

Great Expectations: Brigadier General Haywood S. Hansell, Jr. and the XXI Bomber Command

BY

MAJOR CHRISTOPHER G. SEAMAN

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES
FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

AIR UNIVERSITY

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

JUNE 2015

APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

THOMAS A. HUGHES, PhD

(Date)

HAROLD R. WINTON, PhD

(Date)



DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Christopher Seaman received his commission as a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy (B.S. in History and Military Doctrine, Operations and Strategy) in 2001. Graduating from Undergraduate Pilot Training at Columbus AFB, Mississippi in 2002, he became an instructor pilot in the C-5B at Travis AFB, California. In 2006, Major Seaman joined Air Force Special Operations Command where he upgraded to evaluator and flew multiple single and multi-engine turboprop aircraft in support of special operations forces during Operations ENDURING and IRAQI FREEDOM. In 2011, he moved to Macdill AFB, Florida where he served as air operations officer in the J3, Sensitive Activities division, headquarters United States Special Operations Command. Major Seaman thereafter moved to Maxwell AFB, Alabama where he was a Distinguished Graduate of Air Command and Staff College before attending the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies. He holds master's degrees from American Military University (National Security Studies) in 2006 and Air Command and Staff College (Military Operational Art and Science) in 2013.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people without whose support and help I would never have gotten off the ground with this study. I want to thank Dr Charles Griffith, the lone biographer of Brigadier General Hansell, for selflessly offering his research materials used to construct *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II*. Through numerous phone calls and countless hours, his insight helped me turn abstract ideas into a coherent vision. I also would like to thank the staff of the Air Force Academy Library Special Collections for being flexible with their operating hours during the coldest four days I ever spent in Colorado.

I especially want to thank Dr. Thomas Hughes for his willingness to take a vague idea for a thesis and help develop it into a cogent argument. His inputs were crucial to my ability to take a myopic event and objectively evaluate it in the greater landscape of the war in the Pacific. Discussions in Dr. Hughes' office have been a welcome respite during the entire academic year. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Hal Winton for providing a valued perspective and meticulous review of my work.

Finally, I want to express my deepest appreciation to my family. I am grateful to have children old enough to understand why their father was often absent in spirit throughout the school year. They are smart, funny, and amazing reminders of why I serve. Words cannot emphasize how important my beautiful wife has been to me this year. I never would have accomplished this program or this thesis without her everlasting love, patience, and motivation. To my wife and children, thank you.

ABSTRACT

General Henry ‘Hap’ Arnold’s removal of Brigadier General Haywood Hansell from XXI Bomber Command in January 1945 illuminates issues of loyalty, subordination, and leadership. Hansell was an ideal choice to command the bombers. Yet, the command struggled to produce results commensurate with Arnold’s demands. After a mere six combat missions, Arnold replaced Hansell with Major General Curtis LeMay. Inter-personal strife, poor weather, and operational challenges all contributed to the command’s poor results, but Hansell bore the brunt of Arnold’s dissatisfaction. Arnold’s removal of Hansell was precipitate and not altogether fair. Yet, the demands of wartime and the age-old code of command renders it just.



CONTENTS

Chapter

	APPROVAL.....	ii
	DISCLAIMER.....	iii
	ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	iv
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
	ABSTRACT.....	vi
1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	THE RISE OF A BOMBER GENERAL.....	6
3	INITIAL OPERATION OF THE XXI BOMBER COMMAND.....	23
4	ANALYSIS OF THE DECISION TO REMOVE HANSELL.....	42
5	CONCLUSIONS.....	66
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	72

ILLUSTRATIONS

Table

1	Mission Summary of 20th Air Force Units (Initial Seven Missions).....	45
---	---	----

Figure

1	Aerial Imagery of Maxwell AFB, AL highlighting Hansell Street.....	66
---	--	----

Chapter 1

Introduction

In February 1983, *Air Force Magazine* began a series of stories commemorating Air Force heroes under the title “Valor.” Valor is personal courage, a state of mind enabling a person to encounter danger with firmness. The story of Brigadier General Haywood Hansell’s decision to launch B-29s striking Japan in November 1944, despite pessimism from his subordinates and superior, was the fourth story in a series that highlighted 257 people and organizations over the next 16 years.¹ Despite Hansell’s compelling tale about “The Loneliness of Command,” history and the Air Force has largely forgotten him.² World War II history is replete with tales of courage, such as the Doolittle Raiders and the airlift pilots that braved the infamous China-Burma-India Hump to supply the Chinese. But the fourth story chosen by *Air Force Magazine* is nearly non-existent in present-day consciousness. To understand how this occurred, it is important to know how the mission to bomb Japan ended for Hansell.

In August 1944, Hansell was the ideal choice to command the B-29s that began the strategic bombing offensive from the Marianas against mainland Japan. Hansell was an experienced B-17 wing commander from Europe and had consistently demonstrated the ability to navigate delicate political and military situations. The B-29 offensive against Japan began in November 1944, but General Henry “Hap” Arnold, the United States Army Air Forces Chief of Staff, fired Hansell less than 45 days later, after seven missions. Reasons for his removal have generally fallen into two categories: Hansell failed to produce results, or he simply was the wrong man for the job.

Descriptions of Hansell’s poor performance in command are common. *World War II in the Air: The Pacific*, edited by Major James Sunderman, suggested Major General Curtis LeMay’s primary orders after replacing Hansell were simply “to get better results.”³ Robert Futrell’s *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: A History of Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907 – 1964* noted Arnold’s impatience with XXI Bomber

¹ *Air Force Magazine*, “Valor Articles Index,” <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/ValorArticlesIndex.aspx>.

² John L. Frisbee, “The Loneliness of Command,” *Air Force Magazine*, July 1983, 77.

³ Major James F. Sunderman, ed., *World War II in the Air: The Pacific* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1962), 230.

Command results led to LeMay's arrival in January 1945.⁴ Phillip Meilinger's *Bomber: The Formation and Early Years of Strategic Air Command* concurred with the poor-results theory, although Meilinger also suggested this was a result of numerous problems facing the Army Air Forces entering the Pacific war.⁵ In the years following Hansell's removal, countless people involved, directly or indirectly, in the decision have reaffirmed that poor results were the driving factor. However, there is also evidence suggesting that Hansell's high-altitude daylight precision bombing tactics were indeed working. Authors for the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey* indicated that the effects on even a relatively small number of select targets were substantial.⁶ Hansell himself wrote several texts on the subject of the air war; and, though understandably biased, these accounts provided a reputable opinion that he was indeed producing.⁷ Thus far, academia has not produced a convincing argument refuting or supporting the poor-results theory.

Beyond the poor performance, there is the idea that he simply was not the right man for the job. Just as some have sketched the poor-results thesis, others provided both positive and negative assessments of Hansell's ability to lead. Murray Green conducted many interviews while researching a biography of Arnold, and a large majority of the interviewees agreed Hansell was more intellectual than operational.⁸ General Lauris Norstad, who replaced Hansell as Chief of Staff of the 20th Air Force, thought Arnold "and all of us, including, I think [Hansell]—now know that this LeMay is the best man in the Air Force right now for this particular job.... LeMay is an operator, the rest of us are planners."⁹

⁴ Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: A History of Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907 – 1964* (1971; repr., Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1989), 163.

⁵ Phillip S. Meilinger, *Bomber: The Formation and Early Years of Strategic Air Command* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2012), 56. Meilinger suggested a lack of strategic intelligence on Japan, B-29 teething problems and weather were some of the greatest challenges contributing to Hansell's removal from command.

⁶ US Government, *The United States Strategic Bombing Surveys: European and Pacific War Summary Reports* (1945 and 1946; repr., Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1987), 84.

⁷ Phillip S. Meilinger, *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2001), 43. Meilinger asserted Hansell's texts are some of the most well-evidenced and written accounts supporting strategic bombing in World War II.

⁸ One example of this assertion lies in Murray Green's interview with Lt Gen Barney Giles in 1970; see Murray Green Collection at USAFA Special Collections.

⁹ Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999), 57.

Men either hated or respected Hansell--there did not seem to be a middle ground. Ralph Nutter, a navigator under both LeMay and Hansell's commands in B-17s and B-29s, painted a favorable picture of Hansell in *With the Possum and the Eagle*; and Samuel Russ Harris Jr, a B-29 group commander assigned to the XXIst under Hansell, noted his displeasure with "Praise be to Allah," when informed of Hansell's removal.¹⁰ *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II*, the only full-length biography of the man, depicted Hansell as not only a hopeless romantic, but also a devoted military officer willing to forego family for the mission.¹¹ In short, there appears to be evidence both supporting and refuting the two explanations for Hansell's removal.

Some of this discrepancy stems from the passion of those close to the fight. World War II was a watershed event that not only changed the landscape of the global environment, but also the internal structure of the United States defense establishment. Wartime correspondence and diaries have an unfiltered characteristic that captures the gravity of the situation. Post-war texts and interviews can also be biased or slanted. Primary source material is not the only victim of subjectivity. Until his death in 1988, Hansell lectured at venues such as the Air Force Academy, the Air Command & Staff College, and the Air War College, where he undoubtedly influenced the Air Force's collective memory of the war.¹² Charles Griffith, Hansell's lone biographer, is quick to identify a strong personal affinity for his subject. While completing his dissertation, Griffith became intimately familiar with Hansell through research at the National Archives, the Air Force Historical Research Agency, and interviews with family members. Griffith's text is by no means a hagiography, and it told a compelling story of the positive and negative aspects of his career. But Hansell's death had been relatively recent when he conducted his research in the early to mid-1990s.

¹⁰ Ralph H. Nutter, *With the Possum and the Eagle: The Memoir of a Navigator's War over Germany and Japan* (Novata, CA: Presidio Press, 2002), 173; Samuel Russ Harris, Jr., *B-29s Over Japan, 1944-1945: A Group Commander's Diary*, ed. Robert A. Mann (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 167.

¹¹ Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1999).

¹² In the foreword to *The Quest*, Former Chief of Staff General Ronald Foglemen wrote a favorable remembrance of Hansell's lectures to the Air Force Academy. Further, on a research visit to the Academy special collections, a former instructor of mine, Lt Col (ret) John Farquhar, echoed his fond remembrance of Hansell's lectures to cadets.

Perhaps now, nearly three decades since his last lecture to Air Force officers, the time is ripe to ask, “Why did Hansell get fired?” and reasonably aspire to an objective answer. Did he not live up to Arnold’s expectations? Did the Chief want a man who could get better results? Were Hansell’s planning temperament and relative lack of operational instincts a culprit? Were the results from the Marianas the problem? Did Arnold face tremendous pressure in Washington to achieve unreasonable success from the B-29s sooner than could realistically be expected?

This thesis answers these questions in a fullness of time not available to other authors. Chapter Two explains what made Hansell the perfect choice to command the XXIst in August 1944. Chronologically, I trace his life and career until his time in command, relying primarily on Griffith’s biography and Hansell’s memoirs, but also utilizing additional primary and secondary source material. Chapter Three encompasses the five months from assumption of command in August 1944 until January 1945, when Arnold fired Hansell. In addition to the sources used for Chapter Two, the official memoranda between the XXIst and 20th Air Force, as well as post-war interviews, illustrate the struggles and triumphs of launching the offensive against Japan. With an understanding of the man and the situation in question, Chapter Four analyzes the explanations for Hansell’s dismissal. The thesis will evaluate Arnold’s explanation for Hansell’s removal. Examination of the poor-results thesis follows, which consists of comparing the results from the XXI and XX Bomber Commands to determine if there was consistency in Arnold’s behavior. A further evaluation of Hansell’s production provides insight to the question, “Could more have been done?” The thesis then evaluates the notion that Hansell was more of an intellectual than a combat leader, using post-war interviews and memoirs to illustrate the man ordered to bomb Japan into submission. Beyond the man and his results, the environment of the XXIst illuminates a unique aspect of the situation. Hansell found himself taking command of a unit where his immediate subordinate and lone wing commander, Brigadier General Emmett “Rosey” O’Donnell, adamantly opposed the Air Corps Tactical School theory of precision bombing; and his superior officer, Arnold, maintained unrealistic expectations for the B-29 due to overwhelming pressure.

History is ambiguous. Interpretations arrive from a multitude of ways. The reasons for Hansell's removal as commander of the XXIst will always carry some level of ambiguity. Nevertheless, this thesis suggests historians have largely overlooked how the influence of Hansell's environment, specifically his subordinate's and superior's predilections, contributed to his removal in January 1945. Should Hansell alone bear the burden of responsibility for the poor-results in the Marianas? The first step in answering that question begins with understanding why he was the perfect man for the job.



Chapter 2

The Rise of a Bomber General

Arnold selected Hansell to command the XXIst for good reasons. Hansell's resume leading up to his tenure at the helm of XXIst was impressive. This chapter illustrates how each phase of his life helped make him an ideal choice to begin bombing mainland Japan.

The Early Years

Haywood Sheperd Hansell Jr. was born on September 28, 1903 into a family with a rich military tradition dating back to the American Revolution. His father was a well-respected United States Army surgeon whose career moved the Hansell family to exotic destinations such as Peking, China. The majority of his childhood, however, was in the southern United States. As Charles Griffith, author of *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II*, noted from a family interview, the Hansell household was "devoutly southern" and carried great pressure to live up to parental expectations.¹ From an early age, the Hansells expected young Haywood to follow in his father's military footsteps.

In 1916, Hansell enrolled as a freshman at a private military high school in Chattanooga, Tennessee. While his father was in France as part of the American Expeditionary Forces, Hansell excelled at Sewanee Military Academy. Senior year brought promotion to captain of cadets, the equivalent of a peer-disciplinarian, but by the end of the year he had gained a reputation of being too harsh. Stripped of the position and demoted to buck private, this set-back humiliated Hansell and contributed to his decision to turn down an appointment to West Point, much to the dismay of his father.²

Instead of a military education, Hansell decided to become an engineer and attended the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. Although he experienced the typical challenges afforded to a young college fraternity member and football player, he excelled in and embraced all of the normal qualities of an engineer.³ When a problem

¹ Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1999), 23-26.

² Griffith, *The Quest*, 27-28.

³ Griffith, *The Quest*, 29.

presented itself, Hansell relentlessly gathered all of the data, analyzed the information, developed a plan, and then saw that his plan worked.⁴ When he graduated in 1924, Hansell turned down an Army commission and joined his parents, then stationed in San Francisco, California, to look for employment. Although he had dreams of building bridges and dams, work prospects were not forthcoming. The aviation industry appeared promising, yet aeronautical engineering was difficult to break into without flying experience. In 1928, Hansell decided to become a flying cadet in the Army Air Corps, planning to serve one enlistment term and return to civilian industry.⁵

Growing up in a strict household, Hansell knew the expectation to follow in his father's footsteps. However, his decision to twice decline a military commission demonstrated a determination to pursue his own path, despite outside pressure. For him, entrance into the military occurred as a means to an end and on his terms. Once there, however, Hansell quickly realized he found his true calling when he climbed into an airplane.

Maxwell Field, Alabama

In March 1929, Hansell completed primary flight training and received a second lieutenant commission and assignment to the 2nd Bombardment Group at Langley Field, Virginia. Instantly, he showed a penchant for pursuit flying and piloted at least 12 different aircraft types to test their capabilities.⁶ Despite multiple aircraft accidents and a parachute ride to earth, perhaps the most influential aspect of the Langley Field assignment came from a non-military avenue: introduction and marriage to Miss Dorothy "Dotta" Rogers in 1932.⁷ The newlywed's first assignment together at Maxwell Field, Alabama began a meteoric rise for Hansell.

At Maxwell Field, Hansell first served as assistant operations officer where he was involved in day-to-day base operations in addition to flying.⁸ In a repeat of his work ethic at Langley Field, Hansell demonstrated a desire to go beyond assigned duties and

⁴ Col Haywood Hansell III, interview by Charles Griffith, 16 February 1992, Griffith Collection; Mrs. Dorothy Hansell, interviewed by Charles Griffith, 21 March 1992, Griffith Collection.

⁵ Griffith, *The Quest*, 30.

⁶ Griffith, *The Quest*, 30-31.

⁷ Griffith, *The Quest*, 31-32. Hansell was involved in at least three accidents, two minor and one major. The major accident required him to bailout following an unrecoverable spin, earning him praise from officers such as Ira Eaker.

⁸ Griffith, *The Quest*, 34.

sought additional work. Most notably, he befriended Captain Harold George and assisted him in completing numerous projects, including an analysis of the antiaircraft defenses of the Panama Canal and updating of Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS) texts. This intimate interaction with George, a member of the ACTS faculty, had a profound effect. “Up to this point,” Griffith surmised, “Hansell had considered himself a pursuit pilot, but George dealt with bombardment.”⁹ In 1933, George wrote a letter of commendation for Hansell’s personnel file stating his contribution to the ACTS bombardment text was “extremely valuable” and made possible by his “indefatigable work.”¹⁰ George’s commendation intimated Hansell’s future in bombardment.

About this same time Captain Claire Chennault, like George an ACTS faculty member, provided an unmistakable opportunity for recognition and excitement. In 1933, the Air Corps decided to establish an acrobatic team to represent Army aviation at public functions, develop tactics, and demonstrate them for students at ACTS. Chennault, the Air Corps’ most vocal advocate of pursuit aviation, not only commanded the team, but also determined the three best pilots to round out the group. Hansell met the challenging test through “half an hour of head-spinning aerobatics,” and became a primary member of “Three Men on a Flying Trapeze,” the predecessor to the modern Thunderbirds.¹¹ During an interview with *The Saturday Evening Post*, Hansell recollected, “It is sheer chance that we lived through it. If we had kept at it long enough, we certainly would have been killed.”¹² Hansell’s experience on this demonstration team not only illustrated his technical skill at aviation, but also a willingness to take risks. Hansell remained with Chennault until he took the next step toward his career path, enrollment as a student at the ACTS.

The ACTS designed its curriculum to introduce field-grade officers to the Air Corps, but evolved into a tool to explore airpower’s potential. The nine-months of instruction covered not only the usual courses of logistics and communications, but also practical flying, doctrine and strategy for pursuit, bombardment, attack and observation

⁹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 34.

¹⁰ Capt Harold L. George to the commandant, Maxwell Field, AL, letter, 24 November 1933, Haywood S. Hansell Jr. Papers, microfilm edition, Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, AL.

¹¹ Martha Byrd, *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 41-42.

¹² Sidney Shalett, “This Possum is Jap Poison,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 25 November 1944.

aviation.¹³ While pursuit aviation was dominate in the early days of ACTS, new air war theories and an increase in aviation technology allowed bombardment to rise as the primary focus in the early 1930s.¹⁴ Although Hansell's time on Three Men on a Flying Trapeze did not lead him to become a protégé of Chennault, his exposure to ACTS faculty undoubtedly guided his views on strategic bombing.¹⁵ When he graduated in 1935, "Pursuit Possum" believed ACTS' basic premise: "Independent strategic air action against a hostile industrial nation could achieve the ultimate aim of destroying the will of an enemy to resist."¹⁶ ACTS students witnessed the creation of America's new air doctrine, and Hansell was in position to expand upon it when selected as the school's newest faculty member.

Now a first lieutenant, Hansell served as an instructor at ACTS from 1935 to 1938 where he taught future Air Force leaders such as Ira Eaker, Elwood Quesada, and Nathan Twining and interacted with the important advocates of strategic air warfare. In addition to the usual camaraderie between peers, demonstrated by stories of alcohol-induced tomfoolery at base housing and the Maxwell Field swimming pool, he took his role as instructor seriously. Hansell was always careful to advocate his ideas while tacitly remaining within War Department doctrine.¹⁷ He knew the Army would frown upon any discussions of a separate air service, so as course director he massaged the classes accordingly. In a lecture from April 1938 titled "The Influence of Air Force on Land Warfare," Hansell argued the "ultimate objective of all military operations is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces by battle." If applied correctly, air power could "isolate the troops on the battlefield" and decisively contribute to the object of war.¹⁸ Even as a first lieutenant, Hansell exhibited an awareness of the necessity to operate within the system.¹⁹ Further, he demonstrated a keen ability to decipher intelligence and

¹³ Robert T. Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School, 1920 – 1940* (1955; repr., Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1992), 6-7.

¹⁴ Griffith, *The Quest*, 41.

¹⁵ Griffith, *The Quest*, 43.

¹⁶ Thomas A. Fabyanic, "A Critique of United States Air War Planning, 1941 – 1945" (PhD diss., Saint Louis University, 1973), 45.

¹⁷ Griffith, *The Quest*, 46-48.

¹⁸ Haywood S. Hansell Jr., "The Influence of Air Force on Land Warfare" (lecture, Air Corps Tactical School, Maxwell Field, AL, April 1938), Hansell Papers, AFHRA.

¹⁹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 48.

relate it to contemporary issues during classroom lectures.²⁰ As aircraft capabilities increased, specifically bombers, and targeting philosophies solidified, such as the industrial-web theory, strategic bombing became the mantra for the Army Air Corps. ACTS students and faculty became the mouthpiece for the powerful new weapon-airpower. The opportunity for Hansell to employ these concepts came sooner than anyone expected.

Hansell arrived at Maxwell Field in 1931 as a pursuit pilot. Seven years later he was one of the foremost experts in strategic air warfare. His technical flying prowess and courage were on display with Three Men on a Flying Trapeze, yet he truly shined as a student and faculty member of ACTS. As an instructor, Hansell forged friendships that lasted his lifetime and balanced the delicate line between airpower zealotry and War Department doctrine. In the process, he learned valuable lessons about the military and political implications of airpower.

Washington, D.C. (1st Assignment)

As an acknowledgment of Hansell's potential to the Air Corps, he attended the Army Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, following his departure from ACTS in 1938. Although he felt Leavenworth lacked a full understanding of airpower's contribution to war, his attendance led to promotion to captain in May 1939 with orders to Washington, D.C.²¹ Destined for public relations, Hansell's reputation led to a by-name request as then Lieutenant Colonel Ira Eaker's assistant, working closely with General Harold "Hap" Arnold.²² In fact, when Arnold successfully lobbied to establish air attachés in foreign embassies to resolve a dearth of intelligence in 1939, he placed Captain Hansell and Major Thomas White in charge of setting up the Air Force Intelligence Division. White shouldered the responsibility of establishing the attaché system, while Hansell undertook strategic air intelligence and analysis.²³ More specifically, Hansell focused on everything concerning what Italian theorist Giulio

²⁰ Griffith, *The Quest*, 52. For example, he analyzed the Spanish Civil War and made comparisons to airpower's relative ineffectiveness based on the political requirement to occupy the land.

²¹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 57-8.

²² Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., interview by Murray Green, 2 January 1970, Murray Green Collection, US Air Force Academy Special Collections, Colorado Springs, CO.

²³ Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler* (Atlanta, GA: Higgins-McArthur/Longino & Porter, 1972), 49-50.

Douhet considered the most difficult and delicate task of air strategy: targeting.²⁴ Despite uneven support from the War Department intelligence division, Hansell demonstrated a tenacious desire for data and ingenuity for gathering information on his own.²⁵

Arnold was apparently impressed with Captain Hansell's abilities. In July 1940 the young officer became Chief of the Operations Planning Branch, Foreign Intelligence Section.²⁶ Hansell's new organization collected intelligence on select countries in order to prepare air operations against specific targets, yet they were doing so under the veil of secrecy already associated with wartime nations.²⁷ Hansell's team utilized various open-source materials to establish the necessary framework. Griffith noted, "Without an extensive intelligence network, adequate funding, or adequate support, Hansell had accomplished a most difficult task indeed."²⁸ However, not all leaders were impressed with Hansell's non-traditional methods. When his team championed a project to survey the Burma Road in anticipation of supporting China, Arnold sided with the Deputy Chief of Staff, a Major General Bryden, who believed it was a waste of time.²⁹ Beyond the work of developing target folders, Hansell later wrote his year at the helm of the "Strategic Air Intelligence Section of A-2 led me to a firm belief that Germany was susceptible to defeat from the air."³⁰ The ideas he and his colleagues had formulated at ACTS had the potential to win the war, and Hansell's opportunity to provide targeting expertise arrived in the summer of 1941.

When President Franklin Roosevelt requested the War and Navy Departments prepare overall production requirements necessary to defeat America's potential enemies, few imagined it would lead to one of the most important military documents produced by

²⁴ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air* (1921; repr., Tuscaloosa, AL.: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 50; Griffith, *The Quest*, 60.

²⁵ Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan: A Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 22; Griffith, *The Quest*, 60-61.

²⁶ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 50; Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 23.

²⁷ Griffith, *The Quest*, 61-62. Germany and Japan were already involved in conflicts, thereby exacerbating the difficulty in attaining data on the interior of the country.

²⁸ Griffith, *The Quest*, 62.

²⁹ Brig Gen Haywood Hansell Jr., interview by Bruce C. Hopper, 5 October 1943, Griffith Collection; Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *Strategic Air War against Japan* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, Airpower Research Institute, 1980), 20-21.

³⁰ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 53.

the United States in World War II.³¹ Although the War Plans Division of the General Staff sought only informal assistance from the new Air Staff of the Army Air Forces, Arnold saw the great potential in the presidential request. After some cajoling with the General Staff's War Plans Division, Arnold secured for the Air Staff's War Plans Division a task to develop the air annex for what became the Victory Program.³² Time was a significant factor and Lieutenant Colonel Harold George, now chief of the Air War Plans Division, had just nine days to develop a war-winning strategy. Hansell became one of three officers hand-picked to assist in this monumental task.³³

The history of the air annex to the Victory Program, AWPDP-1, is well documented. This work does not attempt to recount the story. Instead, the value here is to understand the role and skillset that each member brought to AWPDP-1. Unsurprisingly, all four men had served together at Maxwell and instructed at ACTS. First, George was chief of the division and designated lead planner. Captain Laurence Kuter was on loan from the G-3 Division of the General Staff, tasked with calculating the forces necessary to meet the mission. Next, Major Kenneth Walker was the expert on probabilities of bombing accuracy. Finally, Hansell had just returned from England where he discussed intelligence and targeting criteria, and was America's foremost expert on targeting.³⁴ "Drawing from his experiences as a student and instructor at ACTS, as an air intelligence expert, and as an observer of British air operations and intelligence," Griffith noted, "he accepted the task of selecting targets for the AWPDP-1 plan with the confidence of a professional."³⁵

Utilizing the engineering mentality that led to his entry into the Air Corps, he developed a targeting system that sought to disrupt or neutralize the German war-making capability by focusing on electrical power, inland transportation, the petroleum industry, and the civil population of Berlin.³⁶ However, before targeting German war-making capability, AWPDP-1 identified the German aircraft industry as a primary objective to

³¹ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 1, *Plans & Early Operations, January 1939 to August 1942* (1948; new imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 132.

³² Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 65-67.

³³ Griffith, *The Quest*, 66-67.

³⁴ Griffith, *The Quest*, 67.

³⁵ Griffith, *The Quest*, 71.

³⁶ AWPDP-1, Tab 2; Griffith Collection.

cripple the powerful Luftwaffe and clear the skies for Allied bombers. Hansell's role in developing AWPD-1's targeting was "clean, thorough, and intelligent--exactly what was needed."³⁷ More broadly, George and his men took the lessons from ACTS and produced a document that ultimately proved remarkably accurate with its force projections.³⁸ This signal document in the history of the Air Corps was complete, and Hansell's role had been critical. Although AWPD-1 planning finished in August 1941, George and his team took months to shepherd the strategy toward presidential approval as it traversed bureaucratic hurdles. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the Victory Program stood firmly as the nation's first force estimates and its implementation began shortly thereafter.

In April 1942, the General Staff's newly created Joint Strategy Committee provided newly promoted Colonel Hansell a first-hand experience with high-level planning.³⁹ Consisting of eight members, four Navy and four Army, the committee was a think-tank. All members were to "divest themselves of service allegiances and prejudices."⁴⁰ One of the greatest questions posed to the committee from the Joint Chiefs of Staff was "What should be the strategic concept of the conduct of the war?"⁴¹ Having just received an unfavorable intelligence briefing on the war's conduct in Europe, most members favored an offensive in the Pacific with a defensive mindset in Europe. Using his intimate knowledge of the air plan to defeat Hitler, Hansell convinced the members to support the Europe-first strategy.⁴² Seeking to provide some semblance of response to Japanese aggression, the committee also suggested sending strategic bombers to the Pacific in a defensive role, much to the dissatisfaction of Hansell, who knew that it would take away from the bomber force required from AWPD-1. Hansell dissented on the subject, displeasing the Joint Chiefs. Arnold, who believed it was not the time to challenge General George Marshall on air power issues, personally admonished Hansell

³⁷ James C. Gaston, *Planning the American Air War: Four Men and Nine Days in 1941* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1982), 34.

³⁸ Stephen L. McFarland and Wesley P. Newton, *To Command the Sky: The Battle for Air Superiority over Germany, 1942 – 1944* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 74.

³⁹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 83. In a period of four months, Hansell rose from major to colonel in early 1942.

⁴⁰ Griffith, *The Quest*, 84.

⁴¹ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 48.

⁴² Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 45-53.

for going against the system.⁴³ Nevertheless, Hansell once again demonstrated a willingness to stand up for the potential espoused by ACTS.

In the span of only three years, Hansell went from a newly minted captain destined for public relations to a colonel making strategic recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His selection to establish the Intelligence Division and subsequent experience in target development were vital elements to Hansell's development. When AWPDP-1 offered the first opportunity for Airmen to plan an Air War, Hansell was the Air Force expert in targeting and developed a plan to degrade the German war machine. The Joint Strategy Committee provided a high-level opportunity to espouse precision bombings merits, and his deft ability to communicate eventually won favor with the committee. In August 1942, at the personal request of General Dwight Eisenhower, Hansell proceeded to England with the task of turning his plan into action.⁴⁴

European Theater of War

At Maxwell Field and Washington, D.C., Hansell demonstrated not only technical acumen, but also an ability to operate successfully in a demanding high-level environment. Arnold wanted his inner circle of younger generals to have combat experience, and this was the only aspect missing from Hansell's impressive resume. Given the British members of the United States-United Kingdom Air Planning Committee were flag officers, Eisenhower requested Hansell's promotion to Brigadier General upon arrival to England.⁴⁵ Although Hansell's original goal was to implement AWPDP-1, he recognized his inability to stop what he viewed as the inefficient dispersal of bomber resources throughout the European and Mediterranean Theater. "Hansell found himself so caught up in the myriad of operations," Griffith noted, "that he was not making policy as much as he was carrying out the very dispersion of strategic bomber forces to which he was so opposed."⁴⁶ Although busy with the Allied buildup, he flew his first combat sortie on August 20, 1942 with questionable success.⁴⁷ Illustrating the

⁴³ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 53-6.

⁴⁴ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 57.

⁴⁵ Griffith, *The Quest*, 91.

⁴⁶ Griffith, *The Quest*, 93.

⁴⁷ Brig Gen Paul Tibbets, interview by Murray Green, 7 January 1970, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72). Hansell's life support equipment malfunctioned during the flight and he received severe frostbite. As aircraft commander, Paul Tibbets, viewed the situation as a case of fear paralyzing Hansell and carried a negative memory of the entire ordeal.

visibility afforded to young generals, General Carl Spaatz wrote to Arnold later in August 1942 that Hansell was doing a “splendid job” and his “opinions in what can be accomplished with daylight bombing have the added value of personal experience.”⁴⁸

One year following the completion of AWPDP-1, Hansell found himself at the center of another presidential request for information. In August 1942, President Roosevelt asked General George Marshall to submit his estimate of the number of aircraft, by types, that need produced by the United States in 1943 in order to have “complete air ascendancy over the enemy.”⁴⁹ Within a few hours, Marshall cabled Hansell and ordered him to return to Washington to oversee the planning of AWPDP-42. Unlike AWPDP-1, for which Hansell was merely the targeting expert, he was placed in charge of the AWPDP-42 team and had 11 days to complete the task.⁵⁰ Although the basic structure of AWPDP-1, to defeat Germany first while maintaining a defensive posture in the Pacific, remained in AWPDP-42, some key aspects changed, such as updated production numbers and revised target selection. In fact, Hansell displayed adept skill in the political realities of the military in 1942 by placing U-boat facilities high on the target list, despite believing in the inefficacy of using strategic bombers in this role.⁵¹ If Hansell expected the Navy to support the plan, he had to acknowledge they carried considerable influence on the Joint Chiefs’ approval process. Although the Navy eventually rejected the plan in its entirety, the plan became the pattern for expansion in the American aircraft industry.⁵² Even more important, the idea strategic bombing survived and precision bombing remained the tool to achieve the objective.⁵³

When the document was completed, Hansell sent it to the Government Printing Office for processing and distribution. Somehow, Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt’s advisor, received a copy before any leaders in the War Department and Roosevelt approved the document before the War Department had passed judgment. This irked Marshall, who demanded accountability for this plan that reached the President before receiving defense

⁴⁸ Maj Gen Carl A. Spaatz, Commander, 8th Air Force, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 27 August 1942, Griffith Collection.

⁴⁹ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 100.

⁵⁰ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 102.

⁵¹ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 106; Griffith, *The Quest*, 97.

⁵² DeWitt S. Copp, *Forged in Fire: Strategy and Decisions in the Air War over Europe, 1940-45* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1982), 299; Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 105.

⁵³ Griffith, *The Quest*, 99.

establishment approval. Aware of the implications, Hansell quickly described the plan to some of Marshall's aides over the phone and then secured permission to leave for England within the hour. As Hansell reflected in his memoir, "General Marshall seldom lost his temper, but when he did, three thousand miles was none too great a margin of safety."⁵⁴ The quick exit from Washington back to England suggested Hansell was not naïve to a perilous situation and could respond for self-interest.

Upon his return to Europe, Hansell reassumed his duties as air planner for Eisenhower and was appalled by the diversion of aircraft needed to support the campaign in North Africa, Operation Torch. "Our fears were realized," Hansell later wrote of the diffusion of aircraft. "Political necessity was more compelling than military strategy."⁵⁵ This was the nature of war, of course, but Hansell also knew the dissipation of planes would severely hamstring air power's ability to cow Germany from the air. Once again, Hansell had demonstrated an important ability to analyze a situation, develop a plan, and then see it realized on the battlefield. He had earlier proved his credentials at the strategic level with AWPD-42, and now he did so at the operational level with analysis of support to North Africa.

Experience in tactical-level command was the last item missing in his repertoire, but the rapid growth of the services disrupted traditional promotion paths. Typically, an air officer commanded at the squadron and then the group. These opportunities allowed individuals to hone their leadership style as they matured in rank. Unfortunately, many officers caught up in the mobilization for war missed these key opportunities. In early December 1942, Hansell's first operational command came leading the 3rd Bombardment Wing flying B-26 medium bombers from England. His main task was to make the newly formed unit operational, yet a lack of spare parts and ineffective training were obvious immediately upon his arrival. Eager to absorb the experience of his British counterparts who were relatively successful utilizing medium bombers, Hansell increased his knowledge of night and low-altitude tactics.⁵⁶ Before he could launch an operational mission with the 3rd, however, a reorganization of leadership placed Hansell at the command of the coveted 1st Bombardment Wing flying B-17 bombers in January 1943.

⁵⁴ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 111-112.

⁵⁵ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 147.

⁵⁶ Griffith, *The Quest*, 102-3.

Now in command of the only operational B-17 combat wing in Europe, Hansell flew his first combat mission as commander the day after his change of command. Immediately, the German defenders demonstrated their significant skill in anti-aircraft and fighter tactics. In fact, Hansell lost both wingmen due to enemy action during his first mission, and the seriousness of the situation became clear.⁵⁷ The 1st was not the “precision strategic instrument it was designed to be,” and Hansell developed a framework enabling his subordinates to institute changes necessary to realize high-altitude daylight precision bombing’s potential. The day after his first mission in command, for instance, Hansell established a post-mission debriefing where group commanders were to critique all aspects of the mission with “absolute honesty.” Hansell admitted the meetings became a “soul-searching ordeal” that often revealed planning errors on his part. However, they also illustrated his willingness to accept responsibility and make changes.⁵⁸ With the help of his group commanders, one of which was Colonel Curtis LeMay, Hansell instituted positive changes to combat doctrine, including formation flying, lead bomber crews, and defensive gunnery.⁵⁹ Further, he continued to demonstrate a willingness to lead from the front as he accompanied his crews on numerous missions into German-occupied territory, despite close encounters with death.⁶⁰ While leading the only B-17 combat wing in the European theater, Hansell’s reputation as a strategic planner once again led to an important task.

As Hansell transformed the 1st into an effective fighting unit, Ira Eaker touted the benefits of “Round the Clock” bombing at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. The subsequent Casablanca Directive provided a statement of strategic objectives, and Arnold selected Hansell to lead the coalition team developing the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) Plan in March 1943. The primary difference between AWPDP-1, AWPDP-42 and the CBO plans were the former two were “requirements” documents and the later was a “capability plan.”⁶¹ In short, Hansell was to prescribe how to achieve

⁵⁷ Griffith, *The Quest*, 106.

⁵⁸ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 140; Griffith, *The Quest*, 108

⁵⁹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 107-110.

⁶⁰ Griffith, *The Quest*, 110 – 111. On 13 January 1943, Hansell was a crewmember on B-17 *Dry Martini II* when the pilot was killed and copilot severely injured by a FW-190. Although severely disabled, the aircraft and crew managed to recover to England. Hansell had first-hand experience with death and fear in combat.

⁶¹ Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 158.

objectives using the existing forces. Using an updated target list from the Committee of Operations Analysts (COA), a group of military and civilian experts using the scientific method to determine target selection, the CBO planning team viewed its product as an “evolution” of AWPB-1 and AWPB-42.⁶² With operational experience behind them, the CBO planners developed a phased approach to increase the number of bombers in the combined offensive. Hansell wrote the final plan himself, and Eaker presented it to the Joint Chiefs for approval on May 4, 1943. Shortly thereafter, the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved the plan at the Trident Conference, with the understanding the scheme would culminate with a cross-channel invasion on May 1, 1944. In meeting the objectives of the Casablanca Directive, Hansell indirectly wrote “the plan that effectively ended his dream of defeating Germany with strategic airpower alone.”⁶³ Despite a firm belief in the efficacy of ACTS teaching, Hansell demonstrated the ability to account for the necessities of war.

During the summer of 1943, Hansell looked back upon his year spent in Europe with a great sense of pride. He had not only developed two war plans at the behest of Arnold, but also spent the last six months commanding the forces that executed the first American daylight bombing raid on Germany. Entering the theater with no combat experience, Hansell departed with the Air Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Silver Star.⁶⁴ Although the results of the early days of strategic bombing were not up to the expectations of the ACTS, Hansell viewed the disappointing performance flowing from the parceling of aircraft to other tasks. Given the opportunity, he knew that strategic bombing could have results if leaders committed to ACTS theory. One of Arnold’s brightest young generals now had the seasoning necessary to be a key contributor back in Washington.

Washington, D.C. (2nd Assignment)

In June 1943, Arnold and Eaker engaged in a “battle of the cables” over the services of Hansell.⁶⁵ Arnold required a high-level planner to counter the predominance

⁶² Hansell, *The Air Plan*, 162.

⁶³ Griffith, *The Quest*, 118-119.

⁶⁴ Griffith, *The Quest*, 123.

⁶⁵ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 2, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943* (1949; new imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 635.

of Navy and Army ground officers on combined and joint staffs, while Eaker felt Hansell was the ideal deputy to the Allied Expeditionary Air Force under command of British Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory. Although Eaker won the battle and retained Hansell in Europe, duties as deputy became nominal at best, and Hansell went to Washington to present the plan for the infamous Regensburg-Schweinfurt mission to Arnold and Marshall.⁶⁶

While in Washington, Hansell assisted Arnold's staff preparing for the Quebec Conference in August 1943. News of the tremendous bomber losses on the Regensburg-Schweinfurt raid arrived two days prior to the conference's start. Arnold, thinking Hansell's recent experience as a combat-tested leader would be of great value in the potentially hostile conference environment, decided to bring him along to help espouse airpower's potential to President Roosevelt.⁶⁷ Hansell remained with Arnold during a subsequent inspection tour of England and returned with him to Washington in September 1943. Absorbed with the B-29 project, Arnold had difficulty explaining the delays to President Roosevelt and required an expert planner with combat experience and diplomatic skills.⁶⁸ Since Hansell proved he was capable of working in the delicate political environment during the Quebec Conference, in October 1943, he received orders transferring him back to Washington, D.C as Chief of the Combined and Joint Staff Division of Army Air Force Plans.

Upon his arrival to Washington, developing a plan using B-29s to target Japan became Hansell's primary task. There were many doubts concerning the ability to conduct operations against Japan, and Hansell used the upcoming Teheran and Cairo Conferences to solidify support. During the Cairo Conference, Hansell convinced the Combined Chiefs of Staff to "obtain objectives from which we can conduct intensive air bombardment and establish a sea and air blockade against Japan and from which to invade Japan proper if this should be necessary."⁶⁹ When the planning delegation

⁶⁶ Griffith, *The Quest*, 129.

⁶⁷ Griffith, *The Quest*, 131-132. Arnold and Hansell spent 15 minutes advocating precision bombing and its potential to win the war single-handedly. Despite their confidence, Roosevelt still proceeded with preparations for mainland invasion.

⁶⁸ Griffith, *The Quest*, 133.

⁶⁹ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 141.

returned to Washington in later December 1943, Hansell assumed his new position as deputy chief of the Air Staff.

Already familiar with Arnold, this new position placed Hansell in daily contact with the hard-driving commanding general of the Army Air Forces. There was great pressure to perform. Arnold had invested tremendous personal and professional capital in the B-29 program. In a post-war interview, General Lauris Norstad noted that Arnold “used to keep the button on Possum Hansell’s box going constantly. Arnold was into every damn detail ... you know his life was that B-29.”⁷⁰ Arnold’s life was the B-29, which meant those in Washington followed suit. The B-29 program was the number one priority of the Air Staff during Hansell’s tenure in Washington, illustrated in internal memorandums and staff meeting minutes.⁷¹ Hansell possessed intimate knowledge of Arnold’s investment in the B-29, whether overseeing production delays or interacting with Brigadier General Kenneth Wolfe, commander of the XX Bomber Command, who was combating aircraft teething issues operating in China and India.⁷²

In typical Hansell fashion, he developed, briefed, and secured approval from the Joint Chiefs for a plan that accounted for the delicate intricacies of the Pacific theater. In March 1944, the Joint Chiefs endorsed the Army’s plan to liberate the Philippines and the Navy’s plan to capture the Marianas, thereby providing the necessary bases to bomb mainland Japan.⁷³ Hansell’s next objective was securing a command structure that prevented the inefficient dispersal of bombers that he witnessed in the European theater.

The establishment of a numbered air force’s being independent from a theater commander’s authority was a concept only dreamed of less than a decade before by the ACTS faculty.⁷⁴ If the B-29 were to realize airpower’s natural-strategic potential, it required protection from the theater commanders who were tempted by more immediate concerns. A numbered Air Force controlled directly by Arnold was the solution. Although LeMay recollected gaining approval for Washington to control the 20th Air

⁷⁰ Lauris Norstad, interview by Murray Green, 15 July 1969, Murray Green Collection (MS33A1/B7/F24); Griffith, *The Quest*, 138.

⁷¹ Maj Gen Laurence Kuter to Lt Gen Barney Giles, 20th Air Force memorandum, 4 January 1944, Murray Green collection (MS33/B49/8.71); Minutes of the 20th Air Force headquarters staff, 29 June 1944, quoted in *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 108.

⁷² Griffith, *The Quest*, 138-139.

⁷³ Griffith, *The Quest*, 140-141.

⁷⁴ Griffith, *The Quest*, 143.

Force was Arnold's greatest accomplishment of the war, Hansell played an influential part. Hansell was personally involved in securing the Navy's support for the scheme when he convinced Admiral King, Chief of Naval Operations, that Arnold's direction of the 20th was not much different from his control of the United States Fleet.⁷⁵ Once the Navy was onboard, Hansell turned his attention to securing Marshall's approval and succeeded shortly thereafter.⁷⁶ The 20th was born on April 4, 1944, with Arnold appointed its first commander.⁷⁷

Hansell was the 20th's first Chief of Staff and immediately began tackling administrative issues such as logistics, communications and public relations. While he established solutions to each of these problems, he also maintained awareness of the operational issues facing Wolfe in India and China. The first combat mission of the XXth occurred on June 5, 1944, and the next day Hansell requested a maximum effort raid against Japan on or before June 15, the day of the Saipan invasion. On the evenings of June 14 and 15, 1944, bombs fell on Japanese territory for the first time since the Doolittle Raid.⁷⁸ Although the results were minimal, the press coverage was phenomenal and announced the arrival of the 20th to the world.⁷⁹ Throughout his tenure as Chief of Staff, Hansell continued to prod Wolfe to increase bombing accuracy and even accused Wolfe of underestimating the B-29's ability to conduct the precision bombing.⁸⁰ Although not in the field as an operational commander, Hansell's time on the 20th staff provided him invaluable experience with the complexity of beginning operations. Arnold undoubtedly noticed Hansell's relentless pursuit of results and performance. Hansell was a combat proven leader who continued to demonstrate a steadfast devotion to the merits of the B-29 and teachings of the ACTS. It is understandable why Arnold selected

⁷⁵ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 26.

⁷⁶ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 158. As Marshall was absent, his deputy for plans and operations approved the organization. Major General Thomas Handy admitted he was not a fan of the concept since it provided the theater commanders the responsibility of defending and supplying without any control on their use. However, he had no alternative and believed Marshall would approve since the Army and Navy had acquiesced.

⁷⁷ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 159.

⁷⁸ Griffith, *The Quest*, 148-149.

⁷⁹ James J. Strebig, "Superfortress Chief, Hansell, Had Swift Rise," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 2 July 1944.

⁸⁰ Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 5 July 1944, Griffith Collection.

Hansell to command the newly formed XXI Bomber Command to operate from the Marianas.

In the summer of 1944, Hansell stood at the pinnacle of his career.⁸¹ The previous year saw the establishment of an independent numbered air force controlled by Airmen, resourced with the aircraft that could bring destruction to the Japanese mainland. Hansell played a key role in not only securing the approval of the plan that captured the Marianas as staging bases, but also implementing the complexities of the 20th in the Pacific. He understood the importance of the B-29 and demonstrated a consistent desire to achieve results. Unknown to Hansell, the next six months would place him on a trajectory quite different from the one he had been on.



⁸¹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 151.

Chapter 3

Initial Operation of the XXI Bomber Command

But this was a period of courage and dauntless perseverance, when problems were discovered, diagnosed, and solved, a period as essential to the ultimate success of the 20th Air Force as a firm foundation is to a fort.

–Impact: Air Victory over Japan

Arnold chose Hansell to forge the trail of bombing operations from the Marianas for good reasons. He was a combat proven leader with intimate familiarity of not only the air plan to defeat Japan but also the teeth-cutting challenges of the B-29 in India. This chapter depicts Hansell's time in command delineated into three periods: Stateside preparation, deployment to the Marianas, and bombing operations leading to Hansell's relief. Commencing bombing operations from the Marianas was no easy task. Its success, despite numerous challenges, garnered a triumphant characterization by biographer Charles Griffith.¹ Triumph, however, belies the known ending, and this chapter frames Hansell's perplexing removal given the challenges he overcame.

Stateside Preparation

In late spring 1944, Hansell learned he was to command the XXI Bomber Command and initiate operations against Japan from the Marianas. When he assumed command on August 28, 1944, the XXIst had one wing assigned to it, the 73rd Bombardment Wing, then undergoing training in Salina, Kansas. Three more wings, the 313th, 314th, and 315th, were destined for the XXIst, but were in the infant stages of training and unavailable for several months. This meant the 73rd was to be Hansell's only war-fighting unit when they landed on Saipan.² Already at a disadvantage with minimal aircraft for training, much less operations, he realized the strategic implications of getting off to a good start.³

¹ Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1999). Griffith recounted Hansell's command and removal with aptly titled chapters "Triumph" and "Tragedy."

² Maj Gen Haywood S Hansell Jr. (lecture, Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO, 17 April 1967), Hansell Papers, AFHRA; Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 31; Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., interview by Murray Green, 2 January 1970, Hansell Papers, AFHRA.

³ Aircraft and crews often shifted to support LeMay as he attempted to make operations with the XXth succeed.

Perhaps more than the units that bombed Europe, the 20th was under extreme pressure to perform immediately. Whereas airpower held the monopoly of violence in the early stages of World War II in Europe, the Pacific theater was already host to Admiral Nimitz's Pacific Fleet and General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific force, when the 20th became established. As Hansell noted in his memoir, "One major slip and the critics would have had their way--the Twentieth Air Force would have been dismembered and parceled out to the various theaters."⁴ Moreover, years of war had eroded the patience of the American public. Hansell knew the days of "trial and error" were gone, and this necessitated a realistic assessment of the expected fight over the skies of Japan before he arrived in the Marianas.

Realizing the importance of Pacific operations for the future of airpower, the Air Staff once again sought advice from the Committee of Operations Analysts (COA). COA recommended B-29s be employed against a variety of targets such as merchant shipping, steel production, urban industrial areas, and aircraft plants. In his memoir, Hansell acknowledged the Committee pointed out the extreme vulnerability of Japanese urban areas to incendiary attack, however, the painful lessons of the Luftwaffe's devastation on European bombers led the Air Staff and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to agree the first target of the B-29s from the Marianas should be aircraft production.⁵ Once the XXIst destroyed the Japanese aircraft industry, its planes would attack the other COA recommendations, such as urbanized industrial areas, using incendiary weapons and an overwhelming mass of aircraft.⁶ With the primary target identified, Hansell's next task after assuming command was to determine the manner in which to employ the B-29s.

Hansell brought a well-documented predilection for high-altitude, daylight precision bombing, yet this strong belief was not the only reason the B-29s employed this tactic. For a variety of factors unique to the Marianas, high-altitude, daylight precision bombing was the required methodology. First, there was not suitable fighter escorts in the Pacific. In the absence of fighter support, Hansell decided the B-29s would use their high-altitude capability as an additional means of defense against Japanese fighters that

⁴ Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *Strategic Air War against Japan* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, Airpower Research Institute, 1980), 31.

⁵ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 31.

⁶ Hansell, lecture to academy cadets, 1967.

were less capable at that elevation. Until forward bases, such as Iwo Jima, allowed for fighter escorts, high-altitude flying was a defensive necessity. Second, there were serious problems with each of two alternatives: area bombing and night radar. Area bombing was contrary to the precepts of precision bombing and carried questionable results. When questioned about using incendiary area bombs against Tokyo in August 1944, Arnold stated, “I do not belittle the importance of incendiary attacks against Japanese cities, but to achieve any impressive result by this means will require virtual destruction of many population centers and even then there is question as to the effect on Japanese strength.”⁷ Radar bombing was a valuable secondary technique, but the necessary radar maps were nonexistent until aerial photography commenced shortly before the first mission to Tokyo.⁸ For the Army Air Force, daylight precision bombing meshed with Arnold’s vision and fell in line with the teachings of the ACTS.⁹ When Hansell assumed command in August 1944, three things were certain: The 73rd was to be his initial combat unit, aircraft industry was the proscribed target, Army Air Force policy dictated precision bombing as the method to begin the air war against Japan.

Expecting to find his war-fighting unit honing the skills of precision bombing, Hansell soon realized the 73rd was preparing to fight the wrong war. Originally slated to join the XXth in the China-Burma-India Theater, the 73rd found a new home when the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to limit the XXth to one wing, the 58th, and shift focus toward the Marianas. Under the command of Brigadier General Emmett “Rosey” O’Donnell, the 73rd was training to conduct nighttime, non-formation, radar bombing missions that were suitable for the targets of the XXth. In fact, O’Donnell had been advocating for these types of missions since before he took command of the 73rd. In February 1944, as a member of Arnold’s advisory council, O’Donnell argued the B-29 would gain speed if it removed defensive armaments. Coupled with the tactic of using incendiary weapons, it could devastate the Japanese cities in the shortest amount of

⁷ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen Emmett O’Donnell, Commander, 73rd Bombardment Wing, letter, 19 August 1944, O’Donnell Collection (MS43/B11/F9).

⁸ The first photography missions over Tokyo were conducted by specifically modified B-29s, dubbed F-13s. The story of the first aircraft, *Tokyo Rose*, is discussed in all of Hansell’s books, Murray Green interview, and numerous lectures to Academy cadets.

⁹ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 31; Hansell, lecture to academy cadets, 1967.

time.¹⁰ With the concurrence of the Army Air Force Proving Ground Command at Eglin Field, Florida, the tactical doctrine for the 73rd included detailed procedures for a variety of night mission configurations as early as May 1944.¹¹ “It is clear that, as far as O’Donnell was concerned,” noted Griffith, “the 73rd would conduct night operations.”¹² When Hansell ordered the conversion to precision tactics, opposition was severe since the shift necessitated retraining for all crews.¹³ The 73rd had to learn many new tasks: how to use precision daylight bombing equipment, how to fly in formation, how to operate cruise control. This was a major redirection and the wing had one month until the first aircraft departed for the Marianas.¹⁴

Although the B-29 was a combat-tested aircraft, its effective employment still possessed a host of challenges as the 73rd prepared for war. Mechanical problems, formation flying, and bombing accuracy were problems throughout training, particularly evidenced in the results of numerous flights from Salinas, Kansas to Havana, Cuba. The route mimicked the roundtrip flight from Saipan to Tokyo with particular emphasis on takeoff, assembly, rendezvous, formation flying, and simulated frontal weather penetration. By Hansell’s admission, the results were poor and usually left bombers scattered all throughout the Gulf States.¹⁵ First, the aircraft was notorious for mechanical failures in both the engine and defensive armament suites. The engines developed a tendency to swallow valves and catch fire that “burned with a fury that defied all extinguishing efforts.”¹⁶ Additionally, the gun ports of the aircraft would frost up at altitude, making them unusable.¹⁷ Although mechanics solved many problems prior to deployment, the issues with formation flying and bombing accuracy were too great to overcome in Kansas. “It was simply impossible to train bombardiers to an acceptable

¹⁰ Griffith, *The Quest*, 156. O’Donnell was extremely familiar with the peculiarities of the Pacific as the majority of his career occurred in this theater both before and during the war.

¹¹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 156.

¹² Griffith, *The Quest*, 156.

¹³ Conrad C. Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 128.

¹⁴ Hansell, lecture to academy cadets, 1967.

¹⁵ Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan: A Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 170 – 171; Brig Gen H. S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Lt Gen Millard F. Harmon, Deputy Commander, 20th Air Force, 4 September 1944, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2), Air Force Academy Special Collections, Colorado Springs, CO.

¹⁶ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 33.

¹⁷ Hansell, interview by Green, 1970.

precision accuracy in the time remaining,” Hansell remembered. “Training would have to be completed in the Pacific.”¹⁸

It seemed contradictory for Hansell to know the deficient state of training yet deploy to the Marianas. After a trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with Marshall and Arnold, however, Hansell realized that the need for action outweighed the costs of being ill-prepared.¹⁹ In Washington, Hansell learned from both Arnold and Marshall he would leave for the Marianas soon, come hell or high water.

With a requirement to commence operations against Tokyo in mid-November and the arrival of the first B-29s to the Marianas set to occur in early October, Hansell sought to counter the 73rd’s inexperience with the new aircraft by flying in formation across the Pacific during the deployment phase of the operation. Since the 20th was not in control of the aircraft during delivery to the theater, the request went to the Air Transport Command, which denied permission on the grounds that the aircraft lacked the capability. Dumbfounded, Hansell tried to explain the aircraft would fly 3,000 miles with a bomb load in the face of enemy opposition upon their arrival to Saipan, therefore, a 2,400 mile trip from Sacramento to Hawaii with none of these hazards was an acceptable task. Air Transport Command denied the appeal, a fitting end to the tumultuous process of stateside training.²⁰

Hansell wanted to spend the initial period honing precision tactics. Instead, he found himself involved in the struggles of teaching a new tactic to a new unit with a new weapon. Despite setbacks, Hansell realized the importance of the Marianas and felt prospects were encouraging enough to deploy.²¹ More difficulties awaited him in Saipan.

Deployment to the Marianas

The arrival of the first B-29 to the Marianas was a momentous event not only for the men who had worked diligently to prepare Saipan to receive the war-winning aircraft, but also for Hansell who had, in the words of the official Army Air Forces historians, “perhaps done more than any other to plan the VHB (very heavy bomber) assault on

¹⁸ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 170 - 171.

¹⁹ Brig Gen H. S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Lt Gen Millard F. Harmon, Deputy Commander, 20th Air Force, letter, 23 September 1944, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

²⁰ LeMay, *Superfortress*, 94.

²¹ Hansell to Harmon, letter, 23 September 1944.

Japan.”²² When *Joltin Josie, The Pacific Pioneer* touched down in the Marianas on October 12, 1944, it was the first tangible evidence the efforts of those who fought the steaming heat and tropical rains was to bear fruit.²³ *Superfort Saga*, the unit history of the 873rd Bombardment Squadron, recalled the exuberance when the first aircraft landed. “From all over the island they came. Marines who had fought through the hell of Saipan to win this base, aviation engineers who worked day and night under fire to build the air strip, enlisted men and officers from service groups, fighter pilots, correspondents and news reel cameramen joined with the men of the B-29 squadrons as they swarmed around the plane.”²⁴ The men on the ground were not the only ones welcoming Hansell to Saipan as “Tokyo Rose” broadcast a greeting to “General Possum Hansell” over the Japanese radio network.²⁵ The warm-welcome, from both sides of the conflict, was motivation enough to get started; however, administrative, operational, and psychological hurdles needed resolution first.

Administrative Hurdles

If all combat plans during World War II were susceptible to delays due to enemy action and environmental hurdles, B-29 basing in the Marianas, consisting of the islands of Saipan, Guam and Tinian, deserves special recognition. On May 3, 1944, the Frank Report tentatively approved facilities for 12 B-29 groups and their supporting units within the Marianas. Saipan was to have the first two operational airfields ready by October 5 and 15, but determined enemy resistance in the Marianas upset all original schedules.²⁶ Further, Admiral Nimitz’s decision to use Guam as a base for the Pacific Fleet meant construction priority went toward naval efforts.²⁷ When Hansell arrived in the Marianas, only Saipan even partially met the expected development schedule.²⁸ When he surveyed the conditions of the airfields under construction on Saipan, it caused

²² Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 5, *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945* (1953; new imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 546.

²³ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 547.

²⁴ History, *Superfort Saga*, 873rd Squadron Historical Association, 1946, 42.

²⁵ Griffith, *The Quest*, 159. Hansell believed that the Japanese learned of his arrival through interrogation of a captured group commander from the XXth.

²⁶ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 513-515.

²⁷ Kenneth P. Werrell, *Blankets of Fire: U.S. Bombers over Japan during World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 126.

²⁸ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 517.

him dismay. The field Hansell landed on, Isley Field, was not even completed when he arrived with the first aircraft. Isley Field only had one runway, as opposed to the two expected, still required complete paving, and possessed just one taxiway, a significant implication during the first mission. The ground personnel were so preoccupied with the inhospitable terrain and lack of construction equipment they did not complete the mess hall until shortly before the B-29s arrival, nearly one month after they landed on Saipan.²⁹ The aviation engineer battalions continued to work and a second runway was available for use at Isley Field on December 15, but the majority of airfield facilities were not complete until April 1945.³⁰ Elsewhere, the island was “hardly ready” to receive the men and aircraft of the 73rd, and the situation on Tinian and Guam was even worse, where the construction had barely started and not even begun, respectively.³¹

Beyond those problems, Hansell found himself in a precarious position when Major General Willis Hale, commander of the Army Air Forces in the Forward Area, refused to move his smaller aircraft from Isley Field to the other fields. Given the alternate airfield suited the operation of Hale’s aircraft, Hansell attempted to remove them from Isley Field until a showdown threatened to delay the start of the first operation. Eventually, Isley Field became a B-29 only operation when higher ranking officers became involved.³²

Logistics constituted another administrative hurdle for Hansell. The XXIst reporting to the Joint Chiefs of Staff through the 20th Air Force, commanded directly by Arnold, superimposed a striking force incapable of self-sustainment upon the theater’s logistical structure. For example, the process to gain approval for construction involved a series of intra and inter-service endorsements that could range from local authorities all the way back to the United States, with a large majority of requests becoming a hybrid of all options. Air Force historians believed the “logistical channels which resulted were circuitous, cumbersome, and confusing, and few people fully understood their

²⁹ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 515-517; History, *Superfort Saga*, 41-42.

³⁰ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 517.

³¹ Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, 126.

³² Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 45-46; Griffith, *The Quest*, 165. Hansell eventually took the issue to Admiral Hoover, commander of Pacific Forces forward. Hoover sided with Hansell and was prepared to issue a direct order to Hale, but Hansell pleaded to allow them to work it out. In the end, Hale moved the aircraft but lodged a complaint to Arnold about Hansell’s “arrogant attitude.”

labyrinthine ramifications.”³³ Military organizations thrive with standards and norms, but the peculiar setup of the B-29s in the Marianas added a continual tax in material matters.

Acknowledging the tenuous logistical apparatus, the XXIst made establishing a depot on Guam a priority. One of Hansell’s final acts as Chief of Staff before leaving Washington recommended approval of the transfer of the notional XXIst depot to the 20th under the purview of General Millard Harmon, deputy commander of the 20th located in Hawaii. Harmon, who administratively oversaw the XXth and XXIst from Hawaii, wanted to maintain control of the valuable aircraft depot. Hansell realized the importance of good relationships, especially between the XXIst and the 20th in-theater and did not foresee any issues.³⁴ Unfortunately, the inevitable friction inherent in war appeared shortly after aircraft began streaming into Saipan. In mid-October 1944, a cargo shipload of supplies arrived at Guam. Realizing the importance of getting setup quickly, the ship had been loaded in a precise order to facilitate unloading in the Marianas; however, confusion reigned supreme when the craft arrived at Guam amid heavy Japanese resistance. The harbor master, a powerful position in the Navy, stated, “I’ll give you 24 hours to get that goddamned ship out of here.”³⁵ In the impetuous rush to empty the cargo ship, harbor workers dumped the contents in the nearby jungle. The parts and equipment that should have enabled a fully operational depot in short order never appeared again.³⁶ From this point forward, aircraft supplies flew from Sacramento, California, over four-thousand miles away. The XXIst eventually established its own depot on Guam in February 1945, one month after Hansell departed.³⁷

Unlike the airfields he encountered in Europe, where the United States basically stepped into an established infrastructure, Hansell faced truly unique administrative challenges establishing the XXIst in the Pacific. Rudimentary Isley Field stood in sharp contrast to the technologically complex B-29.³⁸ In Hansell’s typical engineering mentality, he saw a problem and developed solutions enabling operations to commence.

³³ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 536 - 537.

³⁴ Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Brig Gen C.E. Thomas, Commander, Advance Echelon of XXI Bomber Command, letter, 19 September 1944, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

³⁵ LeMay, *Superfortress*, 96.

³⁶ LeMay, *Superfortress*, 96-7.

³⁷ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 34; Griffith, *The Quest*, 161-162.

³⁸ Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, 125. Author described one of the many ironies of the B-29 campaign was that the most sophisticated aircraft of the war operated from the most primitive of areas.

Unfortunately, administrative issues were not the only hurdles Hansell needed to overcome.

Operational Hurdles

The greatest operational hurdle facing Hansell and the crewmembers of the XXIst was the weather. Tami Biddle, in *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, argued weather was more of an obstacle than the material aspects of B-29 teething problems. The constant cloud cover and prevailing winds of the jet stream, imperfectly understood at the time, made it nearly impossible for bombers to be effective and amplified problems with formation flying and bombing accuracy.³⁹ “The winds often reached 200 knots over the targets, causing the bombers to drift 45 degrees, but the bomb sights could correct for only 35 degrees,” noted Ronald Schaffer, author of *Wings of Judgment*.⁴⁰ To further complicate matters, winds at lower altitudes often changed in direction and velocity, forcing the bombardier to make any number of corrections.⁴¹

Exacerbating the situation was the poor state of weather forecasting. While crews in Europe faced their own weather challenges, they did so with the added benefit of weather stations to the west to help them make forecasts. The Russians, wary of the United States in the Pacific, provided falsified weather reports and could not be trusted. Decoded Japanese weather reports existed, but the Marianas possessed no facilities able to receive the transmissions in a timely fashion.⁴² Forecasting was a difficult but important part of determining when to launch the precision bombing missions. In the end, the most accurate means of weather forecasting came from nightly B-29 flights and the efforts of a meteorological officer “who did a magnificent job under almost impossible conditions.”⁴³ Hansell was not alone in his assertion that the weather was the greatest challenge facing the XXIst. In April 1945, after Hansell’s relief, LeMay wrote a letter to Arnold confiding the weather had been their “worst operational enemy” and the

³⁹ Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914 – 1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 266.

⁴⁰ Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 124.

⁴¹ History, *The 20th Over Japan*, Army Air Force Publication Company, 1947.

⁴² Hansell, interview by Green, 1970.

⁴³ Griffith, *The Quest*, 162-3; Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 44.

primary reason he adopted low level tactics for the infamous incendiary attacks.⁴⁴ The weather was a difficult challenge to overcome, one arguably never solved. More training appeared to be the best answer.

In the face of terrible weather, Hansell set his efforts toward ensuring the men under his command were ready to conduct operations in time to meet their mid-November start date. The 73rd and its crews were, by wartime standards, comparatively well trained. Nonetheless, the transition from practice flights over Kansas to combat missions over Japan was at best hard for the inexperienced crews, and they “badly needed” the intensive unit training program inaugurated soon after O’Donnell’s arrival on October 18, 1944.⁴⁵ Ten days later, the 73rd launched the first of six training missions against less defended targets with the intention of seasoning the crews, known as “shakedown” missions to smooth off rough spots in takeoff, assembly, and formation flying.⁴⁶ Hansell led the first mission, but his aircraft became one of four to abort and never reached the target. Shortly thereafter, he received notice from the 20th he was no longer to fly any missions based on his access to sensitive wartime information.⁴⁷ The bombing results of the mission against the islands of Truk and Iwo Jima were disappointing, yet served the purpose of giving the crews some experience under combat conditions.⁴⁸

The crews experienced hostile, albeit minimal, resistance and utilized both precision and radar bombing methods with disappointing results. Although additional milk-runs could provide more experience, the XXIst had a schedule to maintain and an air offensive to begin. In the month since the arrival of the first B-29, the 73rd grew by

⁴⁴ Dik Alan Daso, *Hap Arnold and the Evolution of American Airpower* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 207.

⁴⁵ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 548. The training program included general theater indoctrination, formation flying, rendezvous, communications, and combat missions against targets less vigorously defended than those in the main islands of Japan.

⁴⁶ History, *Superfort Saga*, 48.

⁴⁷ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 549; Hansell, interview by Green, 1970. Hansell possessed minimal knowledge of the atomic bomb; however, knew the allies had cracked the Japanese code.

⁴⁸ Griffith, *The Quest*, 172; Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 548 - 551.

118 aircraft, 160 crews, and flew 121 training sorties at the cost of only one aircraft.⁴⁹ The next time the B-29s took off on a combat mission, they would be Tokyo-bound.⁵⁰

Psychological Hurdle

As the date to begin the first combat strikes over Tokyo since the Doolittle Raiders in April 1942, dubbed San Antonio I, approached, Hansell faced three near-simultaneous crises that made his position difficult. Already confronted with a plethora of administrative and operational dilemmas, the third group of problems was psychological. Surprisingly, none of these challenges came at the hands of the enemy.⁵¹

The original operational plan envisioned United States Navy carrier-based aircraft assisting the B-29s during the first strike, codenamed Hotfoot. The intent was to confuse the Japanese defenses and provide the B-29s with fighter support from a carrier task force.⁵² When obligations in the Philippines forced the Navy to cancel the planned support, they recommended postponing the entire mission, planned for November 17, 1944, until they could participate. “If I accepted this, it would clearly show that the XXI Bomber Command could not operate independently but must do so solely in close concert with the Navy,” Hansell noted. “If this were true, why have a separate Twentieth Air Force chain of Command?”⁵³ Although Hansell welcomed the opportunity for the joint operation when Marshall informed him about it in Washington, he hastened to notify Arnold and Norstad that he stood ready to discharge the mission, regardless of the lack of support from the Navy.⁵⁴ The next two obstacles came not from another service, but within the ranks of the Army Air Forces.

The second psychological hurdle Hansell overcame in launching San Antonio I came in the guise of an ominous note from Arnold. On October 30, 1944, Hansell sent Arnold the outline for the initial strike on Tokyo, who in-turn submitted it for review to General George Kenney, commander of the Far Eastern Air Forces. Kenney voiced grave doubts that the operation would be successful, and even predicted disaster. He

⁴⁹ 73rd Wing Statistical Section, *73rd Bombardment Wing Six Month Review of Operations, October 1944 – April 1945*, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B22/F1).

⁵⁰ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 551.

⁵¹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 173.

⁵² LeMay, *Superfortress*, 94.

⁵³ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 182-183.

⁵⁴ Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Brig Gen Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, letter, 1 November 1944, Griffith Collection.

contended the B-29 lacked the necessary range and would be vulnerable to Japanese defenses. Arnold forwarded the dire comments to Hansell, and included a scribbled note that he was inclined to agree with the skeptics. Hansell summarized the situation: “General Arnold did not direct me to abandon or modify the mission. Rather, he put me on record as having been warned.”⁵⁵ The effect on Hansell must have been chilling. Griffith noted it appeared as though Arnold cleared himself of all culpability. If the mission should fail—Hansell would bear full responsibility.⁵⁶ On November 13, 1944, Hansell received a final note from Arnold before launching San Antonio I emphasizing the importance of the XXIst’s mission to Tokyo, and conveying a final vote of confidence that he will make the right decision.⁵⁷ The note was a complete turn-around from the ominous warning received earlier. Without the aid of the carrier task force in theater and tenuous backing from his superior in Washington, Hansell’s lone source of support came from those trusted to carry out his war winning mission from Saipan. Or at least so he thought.

Although the XXIst was destined to be a massive fighting unit consisting of four combat wings of B-29s, as the opening strikes against Japan approached the only unit ready was the 73rd, under command of O’Donnell. Hansell knew there were members within the 73rd who harbored negative assessments for the upcoming air campaign. Beyond the inevitable gossip within any combat unit, certain individuals expressed their doubts, privately, to a Congressional delegation that visited Saipan in the days preceding the attack. Hansell tried his best to be a gracious host, but the delegates were appalled at the austere conditions in which the men lived. These primitive conditions, combined with the apprehension of some men, led to an unfavorable report when the delegates returned to Washington.⁵⁸ Hansell weathered the criticism because he knew his men would fall in line under the leadership of O’Donnell, whom they greatly admired.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 183; Griffith, *The Quest*, 174; Hansell, interview by Green, 1970.

⁵⁶ Griffith, *The Quest*, 174.

⁵⁷ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Jr., Commander, XXI Bomber Command, letter, 13 November 1944, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

⁵⁸ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 185. Whether Arnold received word of this report is unknown.

⁵⁹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 174; Samuel Russ Harris, Jr., *B-29s Over Japan, 1944-1945: A Group Commander’s Diary*, ed. Robert A. Mann (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 169. Harris’ entry 13 Jan 1945 illustrated the group commanders had the utmost confidence and respect for O’Donnell.

Unfortunately, O'Donnell harbored his own misgivings about the campaign. He never wavered from his opinion the B-29 was a nighttime, single-ship, incendiary bomber, despite prevailing Army Air Force policy for operations from the Marianas. After Arnold expressed his misgivings about the mission, O'Donnell presented Hansell with a hand-written note pleading to abandon high altitude, daylight precision bombing. O'Donnell felt it was his obligation as commander to express his apprehension. Hansell replied night area bombing would not accomplish their assigned mission, the destruction of precision targets, and was against the Army Air Force policy espoused by Arnold. If O'Donnell was unwilling to fly the mission, he would gladly replace him. Hansell explained if the mission failed he bore the full responsibility since Arnold already told him as much. O'Donnell acquiesced, and the world waited for Hansell to commence the air campaign.⁶⁰

In a period of only three months, Hansell transformed the XXIst from a notional concept to a war-fighting unit, overcoming tremendous obstacles. Hansell admitted the critic's skepticism was not without merit. "It was quite true that until the time for takeoff of San Antonio I, the XXI Bomber Command had never flown a formation as large as a squadron, a distance as far as Tokyo and back, and had not flown against any enemy opposition. But the potential impact of the mission on Pacific strategy and the future of the Air Force extended far beyond the XXI. ... To those who believed the air offensive was not only the most effective avenue to victory in the Pacific but also the cheapest in terms of American lives, abandoning the planned mission would be a disaster almost as great as the tactical disaster of failure might have been. Still, there was no denying that the decision to carry out the plan was extremely risky."⁶¹ The experts called the mission impossible, while support from superiors and subordinates was shaky at best. If Hansell cleared the mission, despite these warnings, he risked not only the lives of more than 1,000 men, but also his own distinguished career. On November 17, 1944, Hansell made the decision to go, the only choice he was even free to make.⁶²

⁶⁰ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 37-38; Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 183-184; Griffith, *The Quest*, 174-5

⁶¹ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 184.

⁶² John L. Frisbee, "The Loneliness of Command," *Air Force Magazine*, July 1983, 77.

Operations Commence against Mainland Japan

Isley Field was alive with preparations for San Antonio I as the plan was a widely spread secret on Saipan. Twenty-four war correspondents from all major media outlets waited to deliver the news of the operation.⁶³ As maintenance troops fueled and loaded the aircraft, Hansell delivered one last speech at the mission briefing: “Put the bombs on the target.... If we do our job, this is the beginning of the end for Japan. Put the bombs on the target. You can do it.”⁶⁴ The crews took stations and a long line of B-29s formed up on the single taxiway that led to only one end of the runway. At the last moment, the wind, which had consistently blown down the runway, died down. Suddenly, the wind reversed direction and required takeoff from the opposite direction.⁶⁵ Each aircraft had to be turned 180 degrees, but with Isley Field so congested and only one taxiway, it was impossible to expect takeoff and rendezvous to occur with the limited fuel supply available to the aircraft. The first mission did not look promising, and after a short delay Hansell postponed the attack.

For the next seven days, a typhoon held Saipan hostage as it battered the Marianas, forcing Hansell to cancel the operation five times in the next five days, three times with the crews in their aircraft.⁶⁶ The B-29s sat in the mud, fully loaded, as the typhoon moved north, obscuring the targets in Japan.⁶⁷ Given the tremendous amount of media attention and understanding the visibility of the operation in Washington, Hansell was under intense pressure. In his diary, O'Donnell empathized with Hansell's decision to delay the mission.⁶⁸ On November 22, Hansell wrote Arnold that he just called off the raid for the fifth time, but hesitated to write more for the fear of sounding defeatist.⁶⁹ Although unwelcome, the delay did provide Hansell the opportunity to plus up his force

⁶³ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 557.

⁶⁴ Hansell, *The Strategic Air War*, 186.

⁶⁵ With the B-29s loaded to their maximum possible weight, they needed the headwind to get airborne.

⁶⁶ Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, 131.

⁶⁷ Griffith, *The Quest*, 175.

⁶⁸ Diary of Brig Gen Emmett O'Donnell, 18 November 1944, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B44/F3). O'Donnell wrote, “Hansell postponed again – a tough decision in view of pressure from Washington for strike.”

⁶⁹ Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 22 November 1944, located in Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

as aircraft deliveries continued to arrive from the United States. In only four days, the number of B-29s available for San Antonio I increased from 92 to 111.⁷⁰

On the morning of November 24, 1944, 111 B-29s took off from Isley Field with some crews having arrived less than a week prior to the mission. Seventeen aircraft aborted for fuel problems and six could not release their munitions for mechanical failures, but 88 aircraft placed bombs on Tokyo. The weather was clear for the first wave, but forced subsequent waves of aircraft to bomb using radar techniques. Although the cloud cover and excessive winds exceeding 120 miles per hour led to “unsatisfactory” bombing, the cost of the operation was less than two percent of the striking force.⁷¹ Soon after the B-29s touched down on Isley Field, Arnold sent his congratulations: “You have successfully engaged the enemy in the very heart of his empire. This marks the beginning of what I know will be a most distinguished career for the Twenty-First Bomber Command. We are proud of you. Good luck and God bless you.”⁷² Stateside newspapers rushed to announce the news. “TOKYO AIRPLANT SMASHED,” pronounced the *New York Times*, “FIRES RAGE IN CITY.”⁷³ Although the results had been minimal, the punishment of Japan for Pearl Harbor was the underlying message to the American public. For the moment, Hansell basked in triumph.⁷⁴

From San Antonio I until Hansell’s notification of his replacement on January 7, 1945, the XXIst conducted seven operations against mainland Japan and two against Iwo Jima. None of the bombing was particularly accurate, a reasonable circumstance for so new an enterprise.⁷⁵ All the while, poor airfield security, inaccurate bombing results, and poor utilization rates plagued Hansell’s command. A consistent source of tension evident throughout the communications between Hansell and Washington was the state of airfield security on Saipan. In Hansell’s first note to Norstad from Saipan, sent on November 1,

⁷⁰ O’Donnell Diary, 20 November 1944; *Six Months Operations Review*. According to O’Donnell’s diary, November 20 had 92 of 96 aircraft ready for the mission. When the aircraft ultimately launched on November 24, the number increased to 111 of 118.

⁷¹ Griffith, *The Quest*, 176. Two aircraft were lost on the initial operation. One crashed immediately outside the target area when a Japanese fighter rammed it, while the other ditched at sea with the entire crew rescued.

⁷² Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, letter, 24 November 1944, Record Group 18, File 201, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Griffith Collection.

⁷³ *The New York Times*, 25 November 1944.

⁷⁴ Griffith, *The Quest*, 177.

⁷⁵ 73rd Wing Statistical Control, *73rd Bombardment Wing Summary of Operations, Nov 1943 – Aug 1945*, Griffith Collection. During Hansell’s tenure, the 73rd struck Tokyo five times and Nagoya twice.

1944, he stated the fear “we are a sitting target.” The airfield’s congestion, a combination of the 73rd B-29s and Hale’s aircraft, was a great but justified risk.⁷⁶ The next day, on November 2, the Japanese began a series of harassing attacks against Isley Field. In a November 13 note to Hansell, Arnold acknowledged congestion was an issue as long as the Japanese maintained a base on Iwo Jima. Until the Marines captured that island, Hansell needed to remain vigilant and avoid losses to Japanese attacks.⁷⁷ Yet, given one airfield to operate from, there were limits to what Hansell could do.

The first enemy attacks were nuisances, but subsequent raids became significant as Isley Field filled with B-29s. In another letter to Norstad on December 2, Hansell recounted multiple attacks on November 27 resulting in a number of B-29s destroyed.⁷⁸ On December 19, Arnold sent another note to Hansell with airfield security the leading topic and requested Hansell provide a recap of the actions taken to secure the aircraft.⁷⁹ Airborne airfield security was the responsibility of Hale, but XXIst men began to take action themselves. An informal diary kept by the forward command echelon of the XXIst detailed an increase in 50 caliber machine guns, installation of low altitude radar equipment, and the expected increase in fighter patrols over Isley Field.⁸⁰ There was little else Hansell could do beyond sending a few aircraft to rudimentary fields in Guam. When the aircraft needed to be loaded up for combat, they inevitably had to return to Isley Field for preparations.⁸¹ Arnold seemed not to remember that, by his own admission, the threat to aircraft remained as long as Japanese aircraft remained within range. The Marines did not seize Iwo Jima until February 1945, over a month after Hansell’s removal.⁸²

From the training flights in Kansas to the shakedown missions against Truk to the missions over Japan, Hansell was never satisfied with the results of precision bombing.

⁷⁶ Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Brig Gen Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, letter, 1 November 1944, Griffith Collection.

⁷⁷ Arnold to Hansell, letter, 13 November 1944.

⁷⁸ Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Brig Gen Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, letter, 2 December 1944, Griffith Collection.

⁷⁹ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, letter, 19 December 1944, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

⁸⁰ *Informal Diary of Forward Command Echelon*, Headquarters XXI Bomber Command, 6 October – 2 December 1944, AFHRA.

⁸¹ Hansell to Norstad, letter, 2 December 1944.

⁸² Undated bullet information for informal talk to Air Force Academy, Hansell Collection (MS6A2/B6/F12). In total, 11 B-29s were lost to airfield attacks.

His first letter to Norstad following San Antonio I stated, “I am not at all satisfied with the results of our precision bombing.”⁸³ Although Arnold consistently provided reassurance that he was pleased with the progress the B-29s were making, Hansell knew the importance of destroying objectives.⁸⁴ Even before San Antonio I launched, the XXIst began the process of establishing a lead crew school to improve bombing accuracy, a method that had worked well in Europe.⁸⁵ The XXIst appointed a board of officers to recommend organization and operation of the school. The congestion on Saipan made Guam a logical choice, while the shortage of qualified personnel meant the 73rd would provide the instructors.⁸⁶ The tension arising from using resources for training instead of operational missions against Japan only resolved as time passed and more planes came from the United States. The numbers necessary to make this a seamless operation, however, did not arrive until after Hansell departed the Marianas.

The combat strength of the XXIst is another theme throughout the correspondence between Hansell and the 20th headquarters. Both Norstad and Arnold desired to get more aircraft out to the Marianas to provide Hansell with the utmost warfighting strength. While the 73rd represented one-eighth of the XXIst’s combat strength in May 1945, it was the only wing available to Hansell in the fall of 1944 and maximizing its utilization became imperative.⁸⁷ The number of aborts and losses began to take center stage in the correspondence. In a December 19 letter, Arnold emphasized the importance of determining the reasons for aircraft losses and asked Hansell to provide a complete report of every mission since his arrival.⁸⁸ In a follow-up letter on December 30, Arnold added a hand-written note to Hansell. “I am not satisfied with the ‘abortives.’ On that one day – 21 – is far too many,” he proclaimed. “We must not and cannot let this continue. I want to hear from you about this with reasons.”⁸⁹

⁸³ Hansell to Norstad, letter, 2 December 1944.

⁸⁴ Arnold’s notes to Hansell consistently displayed the notion that “your units have been doing a wonderful job” evidenced in the notes from November 13 and December 19, 1944 and January 1, 1945.

⁸⁵ *Informal Diary of Forward Command Echelon*, 6 October – 2 December 1944.

⁸⁶ Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, 136; *Informal notes of forward command echelon*, 6 October – 2 December 1944.

⁸⁷ Public Relations Office, *Public Relations Office Press Release*, 25 May 1945, O’Donnell Collection (MS43/B18/F5).

⁸⁸ Arnold to Hansell, letter, 19 December 1944.

⁸⁹ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, letter, 30 December 1944, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

Hansell knew his crews lacked training and air discipline--these were primary reasons behind the push for the lead crew school. The benefit of this idea also received support from outside the XXIst. In a letter to Arnold, Harmon wrote each passing day demonstrated the importance of a lead school "if we are to get real precision bombing and real results against our selected targets."⁹⁰ From an initial summary of XXIst operations, the school planned to train eight crews at a time in a three-week course with the immediate response in the form of more precise bombing and formations.⁹¹ Max Hastings, author of *Retribution*, credited Hansell with efforts to resolve the utilization rate. "He was harshly treated," noted Hastings when discussing Hansell's removal, "for his efforts had begun to improve the command's performance."⁹² Four days after receiving Arnold's letter demanding a response, Hansell suffered his worst mission yet as aborts exceeded 20 percent on the January 3, 1945 mission to Nagoya.⁹³ The solution, increased training and proficiency, took time, a luxury that Hansell did not have.

On January 1, 1945 Hansell received a New Year's greeting from Arnold: "You have brought to a great many Japanese the realization of what this war holds for them. The year to come will provide you with many opportunities to drive that idea home."⁹⁴ Hansell's efforts seemed to finally be paying off as airfield construction progressed, subsequent combat wings of the XXIst arrived, and the lead crew school would soon deliver its first graduates. The struggles began in September with aircrew training, and then continued with the issues of initial and sustained operations. However, their solutions seemed at hand and a pending visit from Norstad did not raise any suspicion. In early December, Norstad informed Hansell he planned to visit the Marianas in the first week of January.⁹⁵ He arrived on January 6, and informed Hansell he was being relieved of command. Caught completely off guard, Hansell summarized his feelings in a post-war interview, "I thought the earth had fallen in – I was completely crushed."⁹⁶ Major

⁹⁰ Lt Gen Millard Harmon, Deputy Commander, 20th Air Force, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, 20th Air Force, letter, 1 December 1944, quoted in Werell, *Blankets of Fire*, 136.

⁹¹ XXI Bomber Command, "Summary of Operations," 19 January 1945, Hansell Collection (MS6/B4/F4).

⁹² Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45* (New York: Random House, 2007), 294.

⁹³ XXI Bomber Command, "Summary of Operations," 19 January 1945, Griffith Collection.

⁹⁴ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, letter, 1 January 1945, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

⁹⁵ Brig Gen Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, letter, 7 December 1944, Griffith Collection.

⁹⁶ Hansell, interview by Green, 1970.

General Curtis Lemay was to take command in a few weeks, and Hansell could remain in-place as deputy commander if he desired. Realizing the bad practice of a former commander remaining at an outfit following his dismissal, Hansell declined and requested a stateside assignment.⁹⁷

The speed of Hansell's dismissal was almost as impressive as the speed in which he commenced operations against Japan. In a period of only four-and-a-half months, he transformed a notional command from a night, radar bombing unit to a developing war-fighting force from the Marianas. Conversely, Arnold went from a warm New Year's greeting on January 1 to Norstad's devastating news a few days later.⁹⁸ Given that Hansell overcame so many obstacles and appeared to be on an upward vector, why did Arnold fire him so abruptly?



⁹⁷ Hansell, interview by Green, 1970; Griffith, *The Quest*, 189-90.

⁹⁸ As Norstad arrived on January 6, it is likely the decision to replace Hansell occurred prior to January 1st since this was the date LeMay learned he was to report to the Marianas.

Chapter 4

Analysis of the Decision to Removal Hansell

Hansell carried impressive credentials to lead the air campaign and overcame significant obstacles to begin the final push toward the conclusion of World War II. Why then, nearing the realization of the B-29's capability, did Arnold fire Hansell?

Contemporaries and historians provide several explanations for Arnold's decision. None is entirely satisfying by itself. Arnold wrote directly to Hansell and offered his reasoning, yet historians maintain a different perspective. Acknowledging that a single-cause for any decision, much less one during war, rarely exists, this chapter analyzes each explanation with the benefit of 70 years of hindsight. Various factors led to Hansell's relief, though a combination of seldom noted considerations were the significant factor in his removal.

JCS Decision

Hansell returned to the United States a broken man, and Arnold was not oblivious to Hansell's dismay. On February 1, 1945, shortly after Hansell assumed command of the 38th Flying Training Wing in Arizona, Arnold wrote to his former protégé. "I know that the change in command of the XXI Bomber Command was a great disappointment to you and it is for that reason I am greatly impressed with the fine spirit with which you have accepted this situation."¹ Arnold told Hansell he did a fine job in getting the mission started, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff decision to increase the number of aircraft available to the Marianas forced his action. Instead of sending new B-29s wings to the ineffective XXth operating out of China or establishing a new bomber command elsewhere, the main effort would come from the Marianas and "puts all our eggs in one basket."² In Arnold's view, the job had shifted from one of planning and pioneering to one of operating, and Lemay was the best qualified operator given his combat experience leading B-29s with the XXth over the previous four months.

On the surface, this seems a reasonable explanation. It is the one Hansell often referred to as the reason for his removal in numerous texts and professional lectures. The

¹ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, 38th Flying Training Wing, 1 February 1945, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

² Arnold to Hansell, letter, 1 February 1945.

B-29s were using a tremendous supply tonnage operating from China, and shifting them to the other bases in the Marianas offered an easier logistical solution.³ Additionally, since LeMay was superior in rank to Hansell, it made sense that he took command of the XXIst as it rose in stature. When one looks at the dates closely, Arnold's letter appears to be an ex-post-facto justification, rather than a causal factor for Hansell's removal. The Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the revised memorandum describing the Pacific Strategy that highlighted the need to intensify mainland bombardment from the Marianas on December 1, 1945.⁴ It is unlikely that Arnold would have waited over a month to notify the commanders involved if the increased emphasis in the Marianas was the primary factor in Hansell's dismissal. Further, the manner in which Hansell received notification does not indicate an objective decision based on the Joints Chiefs of Staff action. Instead, the purpose of Norstad's visit remained a secret and news of the removal blindsided Hansell. A more likely scenario is the Joint Chiefs of Staff decision to increase the importance of the XXIst provided Arnold with an additional reason to replace Hansell, should that become necessary as a result of other factors.

Failure to Produce

A common narrative surrounding Hansell's removal from the XXIst is that he simply failed to produce. While some historians choose to glance over the issue as ancillary to the greater war in the Pacific, others have devoted more time and analysis to this issue. Philip Meilinger's *Bomber: The Formation and Early Years of Strategic Air Command* surmised Hansell's time in command simply as a failure.⁵ Contrastingly, *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment* dedicated several pages to the XXIst changeover and argued Hansell dogmatically failed to change tactics when high-altitude precision bombing failed.⁶ These texts gloss over the fact Hansell's removal occurred after only six missions to Japan, which was far too early to make any considered judgment about results. Official Army Air Forces historians, writing in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, empathized Hansell was not responsible for hurdles such as the weather, slow

³ Richard J. Overy, *The Air War 1939 – 1945* (1980; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), 98.

⁴ Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., *Strategic Air War against Japan* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, Airpower Research Institute, 1980), 51.

⁵ Phillip S. Meilinger, *Bomber: The Formation and Early Years of Strategic Air Command* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2012), 56.

⁶ R. Cargill Hall, *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment* (Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998), 311-312.

force build-up, or lack of infrastructure. Nonetheless, the XXIst “had not got the expected results and Arnold was not a patient man.”⁷ Arnold indirectly supported the “failure to produce” thesis in his February 1 letter to Hansell. “I want to make it clear to you that I feel you did a very fine job in *organizing, training, and committing* the XXI Bomber Command to action.”⁸ Arnold purposefully left out assessment of Hansell’s combat employment of the B-29s, instead congratulating him on merely getting the mission started. Given the wide range of analysis on the situation, it is fair to assume Hansell did not provide the results Arnold desperately sought, and this contributed, at some level, to the decision to send Norstad.

Acknowledging that productivity was probably a factor, two questions arise and deserve consideration. First, how did the XXIst compare to other units starting out? In other commands, did Arnold hold commanders to the same yardstick as he held Hansell? Comparing the initial stages of fighting in the Pacific with the fledgling operations in Europe is misleading. The difference between flying from England with a relatively proven aircraft in the B-17 and flying from a remote island with a 3,000 mile overwater roundtrip in an untested aircraft is too great. Luckily, the 20th had two war-fighting commands that began flying the B-29 in 1944 in the XXth and XXIst, and a comparison of their first seven missions, disregarding non-primary targets such as Iwo Jima and Truk, reveals striking similarities.

⁷ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 5, *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945* (1953; new imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 567-8.

⁸ Arnold to Hansell, letter, 1 February 1945. Italics added for emphasis by author.

Table 1: Mission Summary of 20th Air Force Units (Initial Seven Missions)

	XXth (58th BW)	XXIst (73rd BW)
Number of Aircraft Airborne on Combat Missions	516	607
Percent Aborts to Airborne	11	21
Percent Airborne to On Hand	54	57
Hours Flown per Aircraft During the Period	51	68
Total Bomb Tonnage Dropped	950 tons	1276 tons
Bombing Accuracy	NOT AVAILABLE	
Aircraft Lost on Missions per Airborne Aircraft	0.07	0.04
Enemy Aircraft Destroyed	33	35
Enemy Aircraft Probably Destroyed	35	58
Casualties on Missions per Airborne Aircraft	0.54	0.33

Source: Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 14 January 1945, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2).

Given similar results, the fate of the commanders should follow suit. Yet Hansell and Wolfe, both who failed to meet Arnold's expectations, faced different fates. Whereas Hansell went to a routine training command, Wolfe received a promotion and new assignment; effectively a "kick upstairs."⁹ Both Hansell and Wolfe had high expectations, brought on by Arnold's fascination with the B-29, and both men failed to deliver. One commander advanced in rank, while the other returned to a nominal stateside position. Acknowledging there could have been other factors contributing to Wolfe's promotion, such as the need for his experience in Materials Command, was there no need for an experienced planner of the likes of Hansell in Washington? The contrasting fate of these commanders questions whether productivity alone was the primary cause for Hansell's removal.

The second question from the productivity thesis is this: Could Hansell have done better? On January 14, 1945, after the shock of his removal had finally subsided,

⁹ Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol 5, 103-104. Wolfe was reassigned to head Materials Command stateside with a subsequent promotion to Major General.

Hansell penned a 10-page letter to Arnold. He identified four major problems that contributed to the difficulty of his operations: 1) The struggle to convert the 73rd from night, radar to high-altitude, daylight precision bombing, 2) bombing accuracy, 3) abortive rates, and 4) aircraft ditchings. Hansell recounted his actions to solve each of these dilemmas and forecast LeMay would be the beneficiary of these changes as the XXIst continued to grow. In the end, he believed his major weakness had been to push the command too hard in the absence of sufficient depot facilities and maintenance support.¹⁰

The problems identified by Hansell share one characteristic--they are all indicative of issues in training. The previous chapter introduced the difficulties associated with the first problem, transitioning the mission of the 73rd. It is safe to say this shift caused consternation among members of the 73rd, and at some level this hostility affected the ability of the XXIst.¹¹ The remaining three problems all demonstrated a lack of discipline, a problem that did not result from Hansell's actions as much as the state of B-29 training writ large. In fact, B-29 wing commanders had highlighted issues with the training program and a negative trend in aircrew performance shortly after the first mission of the XXth in June 1944.¹² The 20th staff was also aware of the lack of discipline, revealed in staff meeting minutes where the first two issues were B-29 maintenance and crew deficiencies.¹³ Even the Japanese considered B-29 training to be an issue, illustrated in a secret intercept of an assessment of the aircraft in July 1944.¹⁴ Training was an issue months before Hansell was in a position to influence change, his corrections needed time to take hold.

¹⁰ Hansell to Arnold, letter, 14 January 1945.

¹¹ The implication of working with hostile personnel later addressed as an alternative perspective.

¹² Brig Gen Laverne Saunders, Commander, 58th Bombardment Wing, to Brig Gen Emmett O'Donnell, letter, 8 June 1944, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B19/F3).

¹³ Hansell, *Strategic Air War against Japan*, 108.

¹⁴ Maj John R. Haas, Intelligence Officer, XXI Bomber Command, to Brig Gen Charles Thomas, Jr., Commander, XXI Bomber Command Advance Echelon, memorandum, 10 July 1944, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B19/F3). On July 10, 1944, Brigadier General Charles Thomas Jr, interim commander of the XXIst received an intelligence intercept from a Japanese crash examination of a B-29 in China where they dissected the newest United States weapon. While the majority of the three pages cover details with regards to the aircraft and its flying characteristics, the final point within the intercept notes: "According to information received by the experts from pilots of our fighters who intercepted the B-29s, the enemy bomber exhibited a fairly high degree of maneuverability.... However, insufficient training of their pilots was seen in the fact that they were unable to fly in formation and came in in single file."

Colonel C.S. Irvine underscored training and discipline of the 73rd as an issue. Irvine, the Chief of Logistics for the 20th, deployed to the Marianas on October 31, 1944 to analyze the logistical chain of the XXIst and develop a report identifying areas of weakness. In his report, Irvine noted the need for better training.¹⁵ The B-29 crews were misusing equipment, due to a failure to adequately stress discipline in training, causing unnecessary tension on the logistical chain.

Could Hansell have done better than he did? Analyzing the four major obstacles he identified shortly after his firing, it does not appear he could have done better. All of the issues were evident before he took command of the XXIst, and only found resolution when given time. Productivity undoubtedly influenced Arnold's decision to removal Hansell, regardless of comparisons to the XXth or existing B-29 issues. Historians have largely acknowledged this fact, often characterizing Hansell's "only sin" as not achieving more significant results quickly enough to satisfy Arnold.¹⁶ Nonetheless, there are alternative perspectives to consider, most notably the idea Hansell was just the wrong guy for the job.

A Planner, Not a Leader

While a large number of texts weigh in on the XXIst change of command with varying degrees of depth, a majority support the "failure to produce" thesis. However, there is a wealth of information found in personal recollections painting a related yet different picture of Hansell's removal. Whether the individuals were friends from the Air Corps Tactical School, subordinates in the Marianas, superiors in Washington, or merely bystanders watching the situation unfold, everyone seemed to have an opinion of Hansell.

Through the lens of post-war interviews and memoirs, in which the repercussions of speaking candidly about individuals diminish with time, contrasting images of Hansell as a military commander emerge. Some individuals believed Hansell did not have the right mentality to be successful, even going so far as to call him "a weak sister."¹⁷ Some individuals believed Hansell would not be successful in command of such an important

¹⁵ Col C.S. Irvine, *Report of Colonel C.S. Irvine*, 30 November 1945, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B21/F3). From the report: "Item 20. That the training of pilots and engineers be more thoroughly accomplished, particularly in emergency procedures and in the procedures necessary for long range operations."

¹⁶ Maj Gen John W. Huston, ed., *American Airpower Comes of Age: General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold's World War II Diaries* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2002), 312.

¹⁷ Dr Edward L. Bowles, interview by Murray Green, undated, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

combat unit. Lieutenant General Barney Giles, deputy commander of the Army Air Force became familiar with Hansell from his time spent as a war planner and Chief of Staff with the 20th. When Arnold announced Hansell would get command of the XXIst, Giles objected, believing Hansell was a brilliant staff officer, too sensitive, and not a tactical commander. Giles pleaded, "I begged him not to do it-to keep him in Washington." He knew Hansell would face tremendous pressure "getting stuff started" and Arnold expected immediate results. Of note, Giles asked Arnold to promise he would not relieve Hansell in the first few months while he ironed out the details with beginning operations. Arnold promised that he would not overreact and give Hansell time to get started.¹⁸ In hindsight, five weeks and six missions constituted Arnold's patience. Since Arnold had a habit of sending those close to him out to choice assignments, Giles' pleas fell upon deaf ears.¹⁹ Giles' story introduces the notion that Hansell was more of a planner versus a commander; a thinker versus a doer.

While researching a biography of Arnold, Murray Green conducted many interviews with individuals involved in and around Army Air Force operations. When Green's interviewees comment on Arnold's decision to remove Hansell from command, there is a recurrent theme: Hansell was an intellectual, not a leader. General Hunter Harris, for example, spent the majority of his time in the war flying B-17s in Europe, yet was well aware of the controversy surrounding the XXIst change of command. "Hansell was a damn good man," Harris noted, "but his reputation was for being a ... policy theoretician."²⁰ Famed *Enola Gay* pilot Brigadier General Paul Tibbets thought Hansell "did his job in the right place, but he was not a commander." In his mind, Hansell was not combat-oriented to meet the challenges in the Pacific.²¹ Some were blunter in their assessment. Irvine, as a retired Lieutenant General in the 1970s, charged, "Hansell didn't

¹⁸ Charles Griffith, *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1999), 171; Lt Gen Barney Giles, interview by Murray Green, 12 May 1970, located in Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

¹⁹ Kenneth P. Werrell, *Blankets of Fire: U.S. Bombers over Japan during World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 139.

²⁰ Gen Hunter Harris, interview by Murray Green, 28 April 1971, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

²¹ Brig Gen Paul Tibbets, interview by Murray Green, 7 January 1970, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

have the merits to have this job. He should never have had the job.”²² Norstad acknowledged the difficulties Hansell endured in the opening of the campaign, yet showed no signs of empathy, suggesting Hansell exhibited an, “utter complete and an irreversible lack of competence.”²³

In contrast to those who felt Hansell was ill equipped, others came to his defense. General Nathan Twining, who became the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President Eisenhower, considered Arnold’s replacement of Hansell a bad decision based on overreaction.²⁴ Although Twining carried a bias – Hansell’s son and Twining’s daughter married – he believed Hansell was not to blame for Arnold’s decision. Lieutenant General Laurence Kuter, whose friendship with Hansell ran from the Air Corps Tactical School days through planning on the Air Staff, reflected on the XXIst change of command with sadness. Although Kuter agreed the decision to remove Hansell was the correct one, it was not due to any lack of ability on the commander’s part. “Hansell was using his force the way it was designed to be used, no doubt about that,” Kuter reflected. “The way it was done (Hansell’s removal) was very bad.”²⁵

Ironically, one of Hansell’s strongest supporters came from an unlikely source, the man who replaced him in the Marianas. LeMay acknowledged Hansell was indeed an integral part in getting the XXIst off the ground in the Marianas. “He did a lot of things his contemporaries didn’t think of, trying to get set up for this command,” LeMay recalled to Murray Green. “But be that as it may, I’m sure that Gen Arnold removed him without making it look like he was being fired for being no good. And this is not the case, they didn’t think he was no good. He just didn’t get this job done very well, or not fast enough.”²⁶ LeMay’s history with Hansell from the B-17 in Europe, coupled with the fact they were contemporaries as the only B-29 bomber commanders, afforded him a unique perspective to weigh on Hansell’s personality. While other general officers were

²² Lt Gen Clarence Irvine, interview by Murray Green, 5 August 1974, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

²³ General Lauris Norstad, interview by Murray Green, 15 July 1969, Murray Green Collection (MS33A1/B7/F24).

²⁴ General Nathan Twining, interview by Murray Green, 2 January 1970, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

²⁵ Lt Gen Laurence Kuter, interview by Murray Green, 16 July 1969, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

²⁶ Gen Curtis LeMay, interview by Murray Green, 14 March 1970, Murray Green Collection (MS33A1/B6/F13).

quick to disparage Hansell as being an intellectual instead of a combat leader, LeMay refuted personality as a primary factor. Instead, he supported the idea that productivity was the likely cause for Arnold's decision.

The views of the general officers provide contrasting perspectives. Fortunately, the reflections of general officers are not the only lens to see Hansell. The XXIst lead Navigator, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Nutter, who flew with both Hansell and LeMay in the European and Pacific theaters, provided another view. After the war, Nutter left the service and went on to become a superior court judge, publishing his memoir, *With the Possum and the Eagle*, in 2002. In the book, Nutter recalled time spent with Hansell in Europe and how he became fond of his abilities as both a planner and leader. After Hansell's departure for Washington in 1943 and Nutter's shift to the B-29, the two men reunited in Saipan, yet Nutter sensed something was different. He was shocked to see Hansell openly chastise members of the 73rd following poor mission results on a December 27, 1944 mission to Nagoya. Hansell seemed detached from the reality of the struggles facing the crews. "I had always admired him as a sincere, idealistic, and dedicated leader," recalled Nutter. "This was not the Hansell I had known and worked for in England."²⁷ Something was indeed different about Hansell. Whereas he arrived in Europe to the welcoming embrace of the hopes of airpower as a means of salvation, the hostile environment of the Pacific theater in late-1944 stood in sharp contrast. It is this environment, a confluence of issues from the 73rd and Washington that led to Nutter's realization the man who was perfect for the job in the beginning was no longer able to command by January 1945.

An Alternative Perspective

Hansell seemed like the perfect man to command the Army Air Force's newest weapon to end the war. Further, he overcame many obstacles and implemented changes increasing the productivity of his only wing of B-29s. Early productivity of B-29 raids was poor, and Hansell probably did not have LeMay's iron constitution. But results were bound to be poor at first, and few men in an Army Air Forces uniform in World War II could claim LeMay's bulldog ability. Could other factors have led to Hansell's removal?

²⁷ Ralph H. Nutter, *With the Possum and the Eagle: The Memoir of a Navigator's War over Germany and Japan* (Novata, CA: Presidio Press, 2002), 208-210.

Although most texts concerning the XXIst change of command hue to the productivity thesis, exceptions do exist. Kenneth Werrell's *Blankets of Fire* is of particular interest. Werrell analyzed the bombing operations in the Pacific theater during World War II, and asserted the great contribution of the B-29s came from their impact to Japanese psychology and shipping versus material destruction.²⁸ Interestingly, he specifically asked the question, "Why was Hansell fired?" Werrell suggested, but does not develop, animosity between Hansell and O'Donnell, as well as pressure from Arnold contributed greatly to Hansell's firing.²⁹

O'Donnell's Subversion

The existing tension between the commanders of the XXIst and 73rd was no secret. However, the issue, evident to individuals at all levels of war, went beyond a simple personality conflict. This section evaluates how three distinct methods of subversion contributed to a perilous situation. O'Donnell's negative actions toward not only Hansell but also Army Air Force policy were toxic to the fledgling XXIst.

A key component of assessing O'Donnell's subversion lies in the recollections of the men present on Saipan during the opening phases of operations from the Marianas. Although Nutter was a staff member of the XXIst and not directly involved in the operations of the 73rd, he saw the conflict between the two commanders was weighing on Hansell.³⁰ The wartime diary of B-29 group commander Colonel Samuel Harris, Jr. is another source of evidence. As early as November 18, 1944, before the first mission to strike Tokyo, issues were apparent. "Rumors are in the air here concerning Hansell-O'Donnell discord. Interesting," Harris recalled. "I have a feeling the going out there is going to be rough and I don't mean combat missions. Remind me not to get caught in the middle."³¹ In all, he made six references to the conflict between San Antonio I and Hansell's removal. When Harris learned of Hansell's replacement he wrote: "Praise be to Allah. There will certainly be some changes made around this joint."³² But, instead of happiness Hansell was leaving, Harris' words read like excitement an uncomfortable

²⁸ Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, 240-41.

²⁹ Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, 138.

³⁰ Nutter, *With the Possum*, 187-201.

³¹ Samuel Russ Harris, Jr., *B-29s Over Japan, 1944-1945: A Group Commander's Diary*, ed. Robert A. Mann (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 49-50.

³² Harris, *B-29s Over Japan*, 167-8.

situation was ending. Major General John Montgomery, Hansell's Chief of Staff at the XXIIst, recalled O'Donnell never liked Hansell. "In fact, Rosie told me, he did what he could to encourage Hap to get rid of Possum." In his opinion, O'Donnell was the "prime factor" in getting Hansell fired.³³ O'Donnell's animosity for Hansell seems unique, but they were merely manifestations of the subversive nature that had served him well.

To this point in the Army Air Force, O'Donnell had made a name for himself by speaking out against actions he perceived wrong. When Arnold toured India in late 1943, then Colonel O'Donnell spoke out against the likelihood of the planned British invasion of Burma.³⁴ As a member of Arnold's Advisory Council in February 1944, he immediately began making employment recommendations for the B-29s.³⁵ After less than two months on the Advisory Council, Arnold selected O'Donnell to command the 73rd, much to the chagrin of officers already promised the job.³⁶ As Arnold pinned a star on O'Donnell's shoulder he stated, "I want some performance (from the B-29s), and I want you to keep me personally posted on what your opinion is of these airplanes as you train with them."³⁷ Arnold expected results and in short time, O'Donnell delivered when he identified engine-cooling as a primary obstacle to aircraft performance while training the 73rd in Kansas.³⁸ While O'Donnell provided the information Arnold needed to realize the potential of the B-29, he soon began a new campaign of subversion.

Open Subversion. Now in command of his own B-29 wing, O'Donnell was in a position to realize tactical innovations instead of merely making recommendations. In

³³ Maj Gen John B. Montgomery, interview by Murray Green, 8 August 1974, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

³⁴ General Emmett O'Donnell, interview by Department of History, 2 December 1947, Oral History Program, Air Force Academy Special Collections, Colorado Springs, CO.

³⁵ Griffith, *The Quest*, 156. O'Donnell suggested the B-29s be flown in non-formation with minimal defensive armament to maximize the speed.

³⁶ Harris, *B-29s Over Japan*, 21-23. Colonel Samuel Harris, then commander of the 73rd, was reassigned as a group commander when it was determined the 73rd would expand to include four groups. Arnold and Giles both inferred that he would retain command of the larger unit; however Harris claimed he was used to Arnold's "curve balls."

³⁷ Arnold quoted in O'Donnell interview, 2 December 1967, Oral History Program.

³⁸ O'Donnell, 2 December 1967, Oral History Program. Following the shakedown flights from Kansas to Cuba, O'Donnell informed Arnold that aircraft cooling seemed to be the primary culprit to poor reliability. With Arnold's backing, Material Command embarked on a rapid fix program to create new baffling to cool the engine.

the summer of 1944, O'Donnell kept in touch with contemporaries in the XXth.³⁹ In a letter to O'Donnell on June 8, 1944, Brigadier General LaVerne "Blondie" Saunders wrote, "We are constantly getting the 'wig-wag' from the great Hansel, and I would like to get him out here and let him take off with 140,000 lbs. I'll bet he wouldn't wobble so much."⁴⁰ At the time, Hansell was the 20th Chief of Staff and made an unfavorable impression on the 58th commander.⁴¹ Although O'Donnell sought to glean usable information on B-29 employment, it is likely Saunders' negative opinion of "the great Hansell" influenced him at some level.

Openly discrediting a leader and tactics in a letter between friends is one thing, writing to the Chief of the Army Air Forces is another. In August 1944, O'Donnell penned a letter to Arnold pleading to forego high-altitude, daylight precision bombing from the Marianas. Instead, O'Donnell recommended utilizing night, single-ship, radar bombing to burn the cities to the ground. He warned the lessons learned while operating in Europe do not equally translate to applicability in the Pacific, and ended with a plea to conduct a fair trial of the individual bombing tactic before falling back on unimaginative use of ultra-modern equipment.⁴²

The six-page letter made a compelling case precision bombing should not be the de-facto procedure used by the XXth, and Arnold forwarded the letter to Hansell and LeMay for comment. Both stated they were in disagreement with O'Donnell's conclusions, believing such a drastic change to be premature.⁴³ "I realize that we will face many difficult operational problems but I decline to believe that we are licked before we start," replied Hansell. "I would much prefer to initiate our operations in the manner which promises greatest results and depart from that method only if we find we can't take

³⁹ Brig Gen Kenneth Wolfe, Commander, XX Bomber Command, to Brig Gen Emmett O'Donnell, Commander, 73rd Bombardment Wing, letter, 14 May 1944, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B19/F3); Saunders to O'Donnell, letter, 8 June 1944.

⁴⁰ Saunders to O'Donnell, letter, 8 June 1944. The reference to 140,000 lbs takeoff is from the desire to maximize the capability of the B-29 beyond the originally designed maximum gross weight.

⁴¹ "Wig-wag" refers to someone signaling wildly or going back and forth.

⁴² Brig Gen Emmett O'Donnell, Commander, 73rd Bombardment Wing, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 8 August 1944, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B11/F9).

⁴³ Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 19 August 1944; Maj Gen Curtis LeMay, Commander, XX Bomber Command, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 19 August 1944; Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen Emmett O'Donnell, Commander, 73rd Bombardment Wing, letter, 19 August 1944, all letters located in O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B11/F9).

it.”⁴⁴ Armed with the advice of two trusted commanders, Arnold replied to O’Donnell and included their comments for his review. Arnold noted, “I am inclined to agree with them that our initial effort should be directed at the destruction of Japanese aircraft industry and in the present state of our development, I believe that that will require daylight precision bombing.”⁴⁵ Arnold explicitly stated precision bombing was the primary method of employment. Shockingly, when Hansell assumed command later that month, the 73rd was still emphasizing radar bombing techniques from O’Donnell’s letter.

O’Donnell resented Arnold’s response. He sent a copy of all this correspondence to Major General Muir S. Fairchild, considered by many the most intellectually gifted Army Air Forces Officer, who was serving on the Joint Strategic Survey Committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and requested his advice on the situation.⁴⁶ In his response, Fairchild warned, “One serious failing of the military mind is its fondness for trying to derive lessons from some battle or campaign and then seeking to make up a rule from that particular set of circumstances to apply generally to all conditions everywhere.”⁴⁷ With that rather vague encouragement, O’Donnell maintained a strong disdain for daylight precision bombing, and actively crusaded against it, even as the 73rd began arriving on Saipan. During a meeting where Hansell informed the 73rd they were about to embark on operations against mainland Japan, presumably a few days before San Antonio I, O’Donnell made an announcement. “My crews are not ready for a high-altitude, daylight formation mission to Tokyo. Most of our crews have only been here three weeks. The missions we’ve flown to Truk and Iwo Jima so far aren’t enough to train the crews. Because of mechanical and maintenance problems we have yet to put more than thirty planes over Truk or Iwo. Our pilots, flight engineers, and navigators are just not ready to fly three thousand miles over water.”⁴⁸ Three months after Arnold said precision bombing was the primary means to accomplish the mission, O’Donnell could not absolve himself from this deficiency. Following this public display of intransigence, O’Donnell

⁴⁴ Hansell to Arnold, letter, 19 August 1944.

⁴⁵ Arnold to O’Donnell, letter, 19 August 1944.

⁴⁶ Maj Gen Hansell and Gen Cabell, interview by Department of History, 11 September 1970, Oral History Program, Hansell Collection (MS6A3/B2/F2). Hansell and Cabell agreed Fairchild was the most intellectually gifted officer in the Army Air Force.

⁴⁷ Maj Gen Muir S. Fairchild, Staff officer on Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Brig Gen Emmett O’Donnell, letter, 27 September 1944, O’Donnell Collection (MS43/B19/F3).

⁴⁸ Nutter, *With the Possum*, 192-193.

provided Hansell with the aforementioned written letter clarifying his doubts shortly before San Antonio I. Finding it difficult to believe that O'Donnell was still resisting Army Air Force policy, Hansell threatened a letter of reprimand if he persisted.⁴⁹ From this point forward, O'Donnell changed his subversion method to something less open.

Subdued Subversion. O'Donnell's open attempts at subverting the high-altitude, daylight precision bombing proved ineffective, so he turned to more subdued methods of insurrection by speaking with anyone who would listen.

Nutter and Harris described an uncomfortable environment on Saipan, but that same tension existed in the airborne B-29s. Major Robert Morgan, O'Donnell's copilot in the Marianas, stated O'Donnell never hid his feelings of disgust for Hansell or precision bombing tactics.⁵⁰ O'Donnell could no longer openly go against the Army Air Force policy or his commander without risking retribution, but the trip from the Marianas to Tokyo was less threatening.

O'Donnell was also not afraid to attempt indirect routes when faced with an obstacle. On December 22, he spoke with Miles Vaughn, Vice President of United Press, where he outlined some of the issues facing the 73rd and precision bombing. "Cautioned him that my remarks were my own personal views and to be considered completely off the record," O'Donnell scribed in his diary.⁵¹ As a war-time license to flirt with disloyalty, however, this diary confession has a thin veil. He could not get his message out through traditional military channels, so O'Donnell turned to a well-respected member of the press to further sow the seeds of discord in the Marianas.

Personal Subversion. The final method of subversion is evident in O'Donnell's diary and personal letters, which illustrate his frame of mind. As early as November 4, 1944, he began writing detailed accounts of the way he would run the XXIst if given the opportunity.⁵² On November 21 O'Donnell penned a two page discussion of how his method of employment would already have experienced results, regardless of the

⁴⁹ Nutter, *With the Possum*, 196.

⁵⁰ Maj Robert Morgan, interview by Charles Griffith, 12 July 1994, Griffith Collection. Morgan, O'Donnell's copilot during Saipan, stated that O'Donnell never hid his feelings of disgust for Hansell or precision tactics. Morgan, who was well familiar with daylight precision bombing from his days in Europe as commander of the *Memphis Belle*, did not hold the same animosity that O'Donnell did for the XXIst or its commander, but just like the other members of the 73rd, he knew it was best to stay out of the situation.

⁵¹ O'Donnell Diary, 22 December 1944.

⁵² Diary of Brig Gen Emmett O'Donnell, 4 November 1944, O'Donnell Collection (MS43/B44/F2).

typhoon. “I am more than ever convinced that the plan for our initial employment is not good.”⁵³ Instead of accepting the decision of his superior officers and supporting them, O’Donnell began scribing calculations to show that he was right and Arnold, LeMay and Hansell were wrong.

The mounting losses of crews, from both combat and mechanical issues, coupled with the increasing number of aborts, made December 1944 a difficult month for the commanders on Saipan. O’Donnell’s diary exhibited increasing frustration, and the issue peaked on December 29. After Hansell berated members of the 73rd for their poor performance on the previous mission, described earlier by Nutter, O’Donnell took to his diary in response:

I was distinctly disappointed in Hansell as a leader when he took it upon himself to give me and mine a tongue lashing which contributed absolutely nothing which hadn’t been covered already by ourselves. He was most discourteous and had no right speaking in that manner except to me personally. He lost much of what little prestige he had with my people and showed himself to be a strictly “fair weather” operator. Last week he was up telling us what a magnificent job we had done at Nagoya. Now that we had a bad one, we stink and are blamed one and all for poor leadership and exposed to thinly veiled threats of having some changes made unless things improve – Blow hot – Blow cold! Good thought for Brother H – The top rung of the ladder is most attractive and very important but watch how you climb there because that is important too.⁵⁴

Coincidentally, this entry occurs the day prior to Arnold’s most critical letter to Hansell, and around the time the decision to replace Hansell occurred.⁵⁵ Norstad arrived to inform Hansell of his removal within a week, yet O’Donnell continued to harbor a grudge well beyond the change of command.

In the spring of 1945, O’Donnell began writing letters to friends providing not only an optimistic update to operations in the Marianas, but also a scathing review of the initial operations of the XXIst.⁵⁶ O’Donnell wrote, “The Bomber Command is only now

⁵³ O’Donnell Diary, 21 November 1944.

⁵⁴ O’Donnell Diary, 29 December 1944.

⁵⁵ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Brig Gen H.S. Hansell, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, letter, 30 December 1944, Hansell Collection (MS6/B2). In this letter, Arnold handwrote his dissatisfaction with the number of aborts and requested an immediate explanation.

⁵⁶ Brig Gen Emmett O’Donnell, Commander, 73rd Bombardment Wing, to Maj Gen U.G. Ent, Former Commander, 2nd Air Force, letter, 4 April 1945, O’Donnell Collection (MS43/B19/F3); Brig Gen Emmett

beginning to develop a staff that is worth a God-damn.” He forecasted failure in August 1944, and warranted criticism for those in command. O’Donnell pleaded, “I don’t want this voiced around ... so don’t show it around or tell it around. I’ll tell you more when I see you.”⁵⁷ In contrast to O’Donnell, Saunders replied, “I would rather wait until the time when we can sit around and bull in private rather than put anything down in writing at this time.”⁵⁸ O’Donnell made the same conjectures in another letter the following week. He did not want to be an “I told you so” guy, but he became just that when he shared the same thought with enough people.⁵⁹ Months after the XXIst change of command, O’Donnell maintained the view that he was right and Hansell was wrong.

While personality differences may have exacerbated the situation on Saipan, conflicts are endemic to any situation where humans interact. O’Donnell’s underlying reason for subversion was his disdain for precision bombing, the Army Air Force policy dictated to him by Arnold in August 1944. Although he did not want to be “that guy,” the fact of the matter is he had been so since he first met Arnold in December 1943. O’Donnell’s willingness to speak out got him an assignment to Arnold’s staff, promotion to Brigadier General, and command of the 73rd Bombardment Wing. Unfortunately, he did not realize when to give up his own crusade and subverted attempts to make precision bombing work. It was inevitable that hatred for the individual leading the charge, Hansell, would develop and exacerbate with time.

Ironically, when Hansell penned his 10-page letter to Arnold in January 1945, he stated that O’Donnell had finally come around. However, the evidence provided here does not support that notion. LeMay realized the toxic environment almost immediately. In a letter to Norstad shortly after his arrival, Lemay stated, “I get the impression that from Rosie on down they think the obstacles too many and the opposition too heavy to crash through and get the bombs on the target.” He concluded, “I hope Rosie will be able to pull the outfit out of the hole, but I have no assurance that he will (Therefore) you

O’Donnell, Commander, 73rd Bombardment Wing, to Brig Gen LaVerne Saunders, Former Commander, 58th Bombardment Wing, letter, 30 March 1945, O’Donnell Collection (MS43/B19/F3).

⁵⁷ O’Donnell to Saunders, letter, 30 March 45.

⁵⁸ Brig Gen Saunders, Former Commander, 58th Bombardment Wing, to Brig Gen Emmett O’Donnell, Commander, 73rd Bombardment Wing, 4 April 1945, O’Donnell Collection (MS43/B19/F3).

⁵⁹ O’Donnell to Ent, letter, 4 April 1945.

better start warming up a sub for Rosie in case we have to put him in.”⁶⁰ In that one sentence, LeMay saw what Hansell did not; the danger of failing to replace a subordinate not committed to the strategy. Wartime operations are difficult enough on their own, more so with a subordinate who refuses to support your efforts. Although O’Donnell’s subversive efforts were a contributing factor in Hansell’s inability to produce and subsequent removal, it is not the only aspect to consider.

Arnold’s Expectations

By January 1945, Arnold was under great pressure to justify the B-29. Whether it was the three billion dollar gamble on an unproven aircraft, the threat of aircraft dispersal that had plagued strategic bombing in Europe, or the pressure of answering to President Roosevelt, Arnold became obsessed with the B-29 program.⁶¹ Compounding the issue of unrealistic expectations, there are signs Arnold doubted Hansell’s ability to succeed even before operations began from the Marianas. Given the pressure Arnold felt, did Hansell ever have an objective chance to prove his worth at the XXIst?

The first step in determining if Arnold gave Hansell an adequate opportunity is to evaluate Arnold’s primary focus around the time of Hansell’s replacement. Shortly after Hansell’s removal, Arnold addressed the Air Staff in Washington to emphasize employment of the B-29s must improve.⁶² Suffering his fourth heart attack on January 17, 1945, Arnold did not relent on his desire to see aircraft numbers increase. In a January 26, 1945 memorandum from Giles to Arnold reporting the actual number of aircraft assigned to the XXth and XXIst, Arnold replied, from his hospital bed, “too many to have only 60 over targets.”⁶³ When Giles informed Arnold the XXIst successfully launched over 100 planes on February 5 with positive results, Arnold’s reply was, “Grand, but why not 150 or 200?”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Maj Gen Curtis LeMay, Commander, XXI Bomber Command, to Brig Gen Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, letter, 31 January 1945, quoted in Werrell, *Blankets of Fire*, 140.

⁶¹ Norstad, interview by Green, 1969.

⁶² Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, 20th Air Force, to Brig Gen Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force, letter, 14 January 1945, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

⁶³ Lt Gen Barney Giles, Deputy Commander, Army Air Forces, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 26 January 1945, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

⁶⁴ Lt Gen Barney Giles, Deputy Commander, Army Air Forces, to Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 5 February 1945, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

From his hospital bed in Florida, Arnold penned an “eyes only” letter to Giles, in which he continued to express concern over the actual number of B-29s operating against Japan. In particular, he referenced two news stories. The first highlighted one aircraft plant celebrating its 1,000th B-29 produced, while the other story discussed a recent 1,500 Navy aircraft attack on Japan. If the XXIst can only produce 60 or 80 aircraft over the target area, then “a change in management is certainly in order.”⁶⁵ Arnold was worried another service would take the B-29 and do what he could not: win the war. Arnold said he anticipated Giles would be told a hundred different reasons why it was difficult to get more B-29s in the air over Japan, such as the need for large numbers to train. “All of these reasons must be pushed to one side with a grim determination to get the maximum number of B-29s over Japan on every possible location,” he wrote. “This cannot be done if we accept excuses and do not face the issue.”⁶⁶ Three weeks later, LeMay initiated the low-level firebombing of Japan. Although these missions were antithetical to the fundamental principle of daylight, precision bombing Arnold espoused in his autobiography *Global Mission*, there were no complaints from Washington.⁶⁷ Arnold was desperate to prove the B-29’s war-winning capability, regardless of the method employed.

Arnold felt tremendous pressure to produce results when he fired Hansell. That pressure began well before the first B-29 landed on Saipan. In fact, it started before the United States entered the war, when Arnold requested permission to solicit bids for a new Very Heavy Bomber.⁶⁸ By June 1940, the Air Corps approved a contract to build the XB-29 and ordered 14 test YB-29s and 250 production B-29s the following April. “It was absolutely unprecedented,” LeMay recounted, “for a huge aircraft of such revolutionary design to be ordered into production without the Air Corps having had the

⁶⁵ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Lt Gen Barney Giles, Deputy Commander, Army Air Forces, letter, 16 February 1945, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72).

⁶⁶ Arnold to Giles, letter, 16 Feb 45.

⁶⁷ Gen H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951), 169-170. Arnold offered 10 fundamental principles that he tried to have the Air Force operate under during the war. Number three read: Daylight operations, including daylight bombing, are essential to success, for it is the only way to get precision bombing. We must operate with a precision bombsight-and by daylight-realizing full well that we will have to come to a decisive combat with the enemy Air Force.

⁶⁸ Gen Curtis E. LeMay and Bill Yenne, *Superfortress: The Story of the B-29 and American Air Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988), 28.

chance to conduct flight tests on a preproduction prototype.”⁶⁹ By the time the aircraft flew for the first time in September 1942, contracts existed for 1,644 planes, yet the three billion dollar gamble on the B-29 did not involve money alone. Official Army Air Forces historians also noted the gamble involved scarce materials and manufacturing facilities.⁷⁰ Although the numbers of B-29s in the Marianas exceeded a 1,000 by the war’s end, production delays plagued the aircraft throughout the process and became a constant source of stress and pressure on Arnold.

In addition to the gamble of money, resources, and production facilities, Arnold faced inter-service pressure to produce from those who wished to use the forthcoming B-29s for themselves. Lieutenant General George Kenney, commander of the Far East Air Forces and with General Douglas MacArthur’s support, wanted to station the B-29s at Darwin, Australia and employ them against targets in their area. Arnold was determined the B-29 force would be used against targets in or near Japan. The Army Air Force began to develop plans targeting Japan from China, and Arnold presented his plan to start operations from China and the Marianas in 1944 at the Cairo Conference in December 1943. This position involved Arnold in a controversy with MacArthur, who wanted the Pacific effort to concentrate on moving up through the New Guinea islands into the Philippines. Meanwhile, Admiral Nimitz wanted to move through the Central Pacific to capture the Marianas, and this approach provided basing for the B-29s to reach the Japanese mainland. On March 12, 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered Nimitz to invade the Marianas in June, putting upon Arnold a quickened timeline to realize the B-29’s potential.⁷¹ With the complex command and control relationships, and the ever-present threat that tactical considerations would divert the strategic weapon, Arnold realized he had to retain overall control from Washington and quickly produce results. In Arnold’s words, “There was nothing else I could do, with no unity of command in the Pacific.”⁷² Further compounding the stress to produce, Arnold wrote his good friend

⁶⁹ LeMay, *Superfortress*, 36-37.

⁷⁰ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 6, *Men and Planes* (1953; new imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 208-209. The full extent of the risk may be suggested by noting that the scarce materials (by weight) for one B-29 equaled the requirement for 11 P-51s.

⁷¹ Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: A History of Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907 – 1964* (1971; reprint, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1989), 158-162.

⁷² Quoted in *Global Mission*, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

Lieutenant General Carl “Tooey” Spaatz in September 1944 that everything coming out of the Pacific war was “Navy, Navy, Navy.” “If we are to get a place in the sun at all in the Pacific war,” Arnold wrote, “in my opinion, it will have to be through the B-29s.”⁷³ Arnold fought for and achieved control of the B-29s in the Pacific. However, control brought pressure for results that only increased once the timeline proposed to the Joint Chiefs came and went, evidenced by his emphasis in January and February 1945.

Another source of pressure for Arnold to produce results came from his relationship with President Roosevelt. Correspondence between the two ranged from the idea of bombing volcanoes in Japan to use the lava flow as a weapon to increasing airlift support to China.⁷⁴ The typical pattern involved a request for information from Roosevelt, followed by a response from Arnold. As early as May 1942, Roosevelt inquired about bombing the Japanese from India. Arnold said the concept was workable, but difficult due to the current aircraft available.⁷⁵

As the war progressed and the calls for help from Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek increased, Roosevelt became more insistent on providing the Chinese support. With the successful flight of the B-29 in the fall of 1942, a plane now existed to support China against the Japanese. On October 11, 1943, Arnold informed Roosevelt, “I expect to have 150 B-29s in China by March 1st (1944) of which 100 can be used against Japan.”⁷⁶ Unsatisfied with the delay, Roosevelt asked whether it was feasible to send B-24s or B-17s to intensify the air war against Japan. “The B-29,” Arnold replied, “is the only bombardment type aircraft with which we can reach Japan from bases presently available to use because our present B-24s and B-17s do not have sufficient range.”⁷⁷ During this period, the Japanese were on an offensive and sweeping the Chinese out of a number of

⁷³ Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Lt Gen Carl Spaatz, Commander, Strategic Air Forces in Europe, letter, 26 September 1944, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72); Gen H.H. Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces, to Lt Gen Carl Spaatz, Commander, Strategic Air Forces in Europe, letter, 29 September 1944, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B106/F2).

⁷⁴ The FDR archive is located online and Arnold has his own dedicated folder. The conversation about using lava as a weapon occurred in May and June 1942.

⁷⁵ President Roosevelt to General Arnold, letter, 19 May 1942; General Arnold to President Roosevelt, letter, 20 May 1942; General Arnold to President Roosevelt, letter, 15 June 1942, all letters located in Presidential Safe File: Japan, Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

⁷⁶ *Digest of Correspondence between Arnold and Roosevelt*, 11 October 1943, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

⁷⁷ General Arnold to President Roosevelt, letter, 18 October 1943, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

bases. Chiang Kai-Shek was putting the heat on Roosevelt, and Roosevelt passed it along to Arnold.⁷⁸ In a repeat of the argument to the Joint Chiefs, Arnold told the President that he could not act now. Wait, he said, for the B-29.

At the start of 1944, the B-29 was the number one priority of Arnold, and therefore the Air Staff. Implementation of the B-29 program was the first on a list of 14 priority projects. The size, composition, and distribution of post-war air forces was number thirteen on the list, indicating that Arnold was not focused as much on the future as trying to answer the pressure he already faced.⁷⁹ As the year progressed, the pressure on Arnold to get the B-29s involved in the fight increased. In March Roosevelt told Major General Claire Chennault, the senior American Airmen in China, "I have had a hope that we could get at least one bombing expedition against Tokio before the second anniversary of Doolittle's flight. I really believe the morale effect would help!"⁸⁰ Unfortunately, the Army Air Force Arnold could not meet the President's wish as the first B-29s raids from the XXth did not occur until June 5, 1944.⁸¹

Between the gamble on the B-29, the promises to the Joint Chiefs, and the expectations of a President that maintained a key interest, Arnold was understandably anxious to begin combat operations from the Marianas. In a post-war interview, Norstad revealed Roosevelt was also keen to know when the air campaign from Saipan would start. Although the Air Staff had agreed to say nothing to the President until the first mission against Tokyo was successful, Arnold could not resist and let him know the night before San Antonio I's original start date. When the operation did not take off due to weather, he was noticeably embarrassed. Norstad offered: "Oh, he was embarrassed mad at everybody. He was angry as hell – with me – with Hansell, with anybody who had anything to do with it; you would think that we were personally responsible for it."⁸² The President inquired about the mission and Arnold informed him of the delay, but promised action the next day. When weather cancelled the mission again, Arnold told

⁷⁸ Notes, undated, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

⁷⁹ Laurence Kuter to Barney Giles, 20th Air Force memorandum, 4 January 1944, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

⁸⁰ President Franklin Roosevelt to Maj Gen Claire Chennault, letter, 15 March 1944, Presidential Safe File: AAF, Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

⁸¹ The first strikes were against Japanese held railroad facilities in Thailand. The first strike against the Japanese home islands occurred on 15 June 1944, two months after Roosevelt's desired date.

⁸² Norstad, interview by Green, 15 July 1969.

Norstad to order the mission, regardless of the typhoon. Norstad refused and Arnold stormed out of the room.⁸³ The need to perform, driven by the great pressure Arnold faced to realize the B-29's potential, were so high, typhoon be damned, the XXIst had to launch. Before Hansell launched his first B-29 raid, the threshold for acceptable performance was incredibly high. Although Hansell had no control over the weather, Norstad believed the delay, and Arnold's subsequent embarrassment, contributed on some level to Hansell's removal.⁸⁴

If the weather in the Marianas did not allow Arnold to demonstrate the B-29, he resolved to solve the dilemma himself. On November 20, 1944, he invited Roosevelt and key government officials to inspect a B-29 at Washington National Airport.⁸⁵ Although the President had to cancel the day prior to the visit, he insisted that members of his Cabinet view the aircraft to appreciate its tremendous worth.⁸⁶ Arnold and Roosevelt both knew that the B-29 represented a symbol of victory in the Pacific. After the war, LeMay recollected that the B-29 was Arnold's "Trump Card."⁸⁷ Once operations from the Marianas began on November 24, 1944, seven months after the President hoped for date to strike Tokyo, the pressure to produce was so high that no single wing could satiate Arnold.

The high bar of success for B-29 operations was but one aspect of Arnold's disposition toward Hansell. Hansell may not have been Arnold's first choice to command the XXIst. LeMay was. Originally scheduled to stand up the XXIst, he found his way to the XXth instead as a result of a leadership gap left by the removal of Brigadier General Wolfe, commander of the XXth, in the summer of 1944. Arnold could no longer stomach Wolfe's poor productivity. Besides, he knew LeMay was the man to get the job done instead of grappling with the inevitable growing pains of the XXIst. When LeMay arrived to the XXth, Saunders claimed he received a hand-written note from Arnold stating he was to get him oriented in theater, then come home and organize

⁸³ Norstad quoted by Brownlee Haydon in unnamed RAND report, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

⁸⁴ Norstad, interview by Green, 15 July 1969.

⁸⁵ Incidentally, he chose 25 Nov at the date in order to provide a buffer for further weather delays.

⁸⁶ *Summary of correspondence*, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

⁸⁷ Dik Alan Daso, *Hap Arnold and the Evolution of American Airpower* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 195.

the XXIst before returning to “have the final air offensive against Japan.”⁸⁸

Unfortunately, Saunders suffered a crash that prevented him from taking command. With his first two choices to command the XXIst gone, Arnold appeared to settle for his third-choice, Hansell.

By September 1944, Arnold was convinced combat experience was essential to a successful bomber commander. In a letter to Spaatz, he stated: “With all due respect to Wolfe he did his best, and he did a grand job, but LeMay’s operations make Wolfe’s very amateurish.”⁸⁹ LeMay’s intrepid history as a combat bomber commander in Europe made him the logical choice to lead the B-29 effort, but Wolfe’s lack of productivity forced his removal. Although Saunders carried a balanced repertoire of command and staff time, he most recently commanded the first operational B-29 wing. Although Hansell had time in command in Europe, it was minimal due to his involvement in numerous high-level planning efforts, and Arnold displayed trepidation. “I am fearful that the same thing (a repeat of Wolfe’s inability) will happen to the other Bomber Commands as I create them.”⁹⁰ Arnold wrote this letter one month following Hansell’s assumption of command and after meeting with him in Washington to discuss the deployment to Saipan. It is difficult to imagine Arnold is not referring to Hansell, his newest Bomber Commander and the only other one besides LeMay reporting directly to the 20th. Before Hansell even arrived in the Marianas, Arnold doubted his ability to succeed.

Compounding Arnold’s suspicion Hansell could not succeed was the glaring contrast between his two bomber commanders. Although LeMay gained notoriety in the Marianas for the eventual decision to initiate the low-level firebombing of Japan, Arnold’s growing appreciation began much earlier. Of particular interest is the language present in Arnold’s wartime correspondence while LeMay was leading the XXth.

In early fall of 1944, Arnold heaped praise on LeMay, while he grew impatient with Hansell for the delays in the Tokyo offensive and causing embarrassment in Washington. As the XXth and XXIst operations continued into December, Arnold’s

⁸⁸ Brig Gen LaVerne Saunders, Former Commander 58th Bombardment Wing, to Murray Green, historian, letter, 3 November 1970, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.71).

⁸⁹ Arnold to Spaatz, letter, 29 September 1944.

⁹⁰ Arnold to Spaatz, letter, 29 September 1944.

admiration for LeMay continued to grow. “I think we can do better bombing with the B-29 than has been done by any aircraft up to this time and I expect you to be the one to prove this.”⁹¹ Arnold had two B-29 bomber commanders conducting operations in late-1944, but clearly favored the one providing results instead of the one full of excuses. While Hansell wrote long letters, telling Arnold why he did not do much yesterday, LeMay wrote a half a page, telling him what he did yesterday.⁹² Given the tremendous amount of pressure to produce results, Arnold did not care about the challenges Hansell faced. In LeMay, he had a commander with a history of improving bombing results in not only Europe with the B-17, but also China with the B-29. Arnold believed LeMay was the man for the job originally, showed anxiety over Hansell’s abilities in September 1944, and disregarded the challenges facing the XXIst. Hansell never had a chance.

While Hansell’s productivity was undoubtedly a cause for his removal, it is difficult to lay the blame on Hansell when one considers the amount of work he accomplished with minimal aircraft and support. Although some individuals believed Hansell never had the mettle to be a combat commander, many believed otherwise. Beyond analysis of personality, however, there is an alternative perspective to view the XXIst change of command. I argue Hansell was in a virtually untenable position when he landed on Saipan in October 1944. O’Donnell, commander of his only wing, never provided the support expected of a subordinate. Instead, he subverted the efforts to institute precision bombing. Further, Arnold was under so much pressure to have the B-29 perform that no commander with one wing of aircraft could meet his expectations, much less one whose name was not LeMay. Hansell was caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place, and historians should recognize the importance of context when evaluating the XXIst change of command. Arnold’s expectations for the initial operations of the XXIst and the result of promises building over the preceding years were unrealistic; especially considering O’Donnell never believed in the effort and Arnold had doubts before operations began. The hostile environment waiting in Saipan meant the decision to fire Hansell occurred before he ever arrived in theater.

⁹¹ Notes, undated, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72) “I want to thank you for the letter of the 29th of Nov,” is a phrase Green claimed Arnold seldom used to his field commanders.

⁹² Col James Maher, interview by Murray Green, 29 December 1970, Murray Green Collection (MS33/B49/8.72). Assertion made by Murray Green.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

There's a very fine line between the courageous pursuit of a difficult project and quitting because you're afraid it won't work.

Maj Gen Haywood S. Hansell, Jr

The majority of Air Force officers spend at least some portion of their careers at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Few would recognize the namesake of a road near the gymnasium, Hansell Street. Interestingly, the road stands out prominently in a 1937 aerial photograph of Maxwell. Located in the middle of the base and seemingly encompassing all operations with a broad arc, the road symbolized Hansell's potential to make an impact on the fledgling Air Corps. In 2015, just like Hansell himself, the road has lost its prominence among the maze of streets surrounding it.



Figure 1: Aerial Imagery of Maxwell AFB, AL highlighting Hansell Street

Source: Author's original work compiled from University of Alabama and Google Maps.

How did one individual, with such a promising career, become a footnote in Air Force history?

At an early age, Hansell demonstrated the innate ability to identify a problem and follow through with a solution. After he entered the service and found himself at Maxwell Field in the 1930s, he proved his flying ability by performing with Three Men on a Flying Trapeze, the predecessor of the modern Thunderbirds. Hansell's involvement

with the Air Corps Tactical School, as a student and instructor, was the defining moment of his time at Maxwell and enabled him to hone the Army Air Forces' concept of daylight, precision bombing. Arriving in Washington in 1939, Hansell became involved in targeting, particularly when called upon to develop AWPD-1. Eager to see combat, Hansell received command of the 1st Bombardment Wing in Europe until his talents as a staff officer drew him back to Washington. Hansell was integral in not only establishing the notion of the 20th Air Force, but also in having the Marianas designated as an objective, thereby allowing Arnold to realize the B-29's potential against the Japanese mainland. When Arnold selected him to command the XXIst, Hansell seemed like the perfect man for the job.

Hansell's time in command was full of challenges. Given the multitude of obstacles he overcame, launching operations in November 1944 was an accomplishment by itself. The difficulty of transitioning the 73rd from night, radar bombing to daylight, precision bombing was no small task. When the B-29s began arriving in the Marianas, Hansell had a host of issues to overcome. He overcame administrative, operational, and psychological hurdles to commence San Antonio I, the beginning of the air offensive against Japan. Beyond these challenges, Hansell had about one month, and seven missions, before Arnold decided to replace him with LeMay. During this time, he continued to deal with airfield attacks to his small force, poor accuracy from the 73rd, and delays in receiving combat replacements. Given the obstacles overcome, Arnold's decision seems rash.

There are many explanations for Hansell's replacement. Although Arnold explained the Joint Chiefs of Staff decision to bolster B-29 operations from the Marianas meant that LeMay would command there, this appears to be but a good excuse. The secretive manner in which Arnold chose to relieve Hansell belies this obvious, although logical, explanation.¹ The overwhelming explanation is Hansell simply failed to produce fast enough for Arnold. Productivity played a role, but two additional aspects mattered as well. First, the missions of the XXIst, compared to those of the XXth, were strikingly similar, yet Arnold treated the two commanders differently. Whereas Wolfe received a

¹ On January 1, 1945, LeMay received orders to meet Norstad in Guam, whereas Hansell received a New Year's greeting.

promotion when he was relieved from the XXth, Hansell did not and retreated to a state-side training assignment. If inadequate mission accomplishment was the primary factor, why treat the outgoing commanders differently? It is possible some combination of talent and job availability explains where the ousted commanders landed, but that merely suggests productivity was not the sole issue behind Hansell's removal.

Second, the issues Hansell faced were endemic to the B-29 program before he assumed command of the XXIst. The only solution to the lack of discipline exhibited by the crews was training, but the solution meant fewer aircraft to strike Japan, which put Hansell in an untenable situation. He chose to implement the changes, but the benefits materialized only after Norstad's visit in 1945. In the end, productivity was undoubtedly a factor. But the inconsistency between the XXth and XXIst changeovers, coupled with an analysis that Hansell could not have done more, places doubt that this was the primary cause.

Another explanation for Arnold's decision to fire Hansell was that he simply did not have what it took to be a combat commander. Numerous contemporaries contended Hansell was more of a planner than a leader. Giles begged Arnold not to place him in command. Contrastingly, there are numerous accounts of individuals who felt the opposite. Both LeMay and O'Donnell recognized that, through no fault of his own, Hansell was in a difficult position. Unsurprisingly, there is no clear consensus as to whether Hansell had the mettle to be a combat commander. Personality could have played an issue, but not the definitive one.

With no overwhelming explanation for Arnold's decision, this thesis offers an alternative perspective, one which widens the aperture beyond Hansell alone and also sees individuals immediately above and below him in the chain of command. Looking first at O'Donnell, examination of correspondence and diary entries depicts the image of an individual too consumed by his own regard for night, radar bombing to be committed to successful daylight, precision bombing. Arnold and Hansell continually denied individual pleas to abandon daylight, precision bombing, so O'Donnell turned to his diary and internal animosity within his wing. It was unrealistic to expect Hansell to be effective when his only wing commander openly disparaged his plan, a concept that LeMay understood when he warned Norstad that a replacement for O'Donnell could be

required. From this perspective, perhaps Hansell was the wrong man for the job in failing to recognize, as LeMay did almost immediately, the importance of a supportive wing commander. Nonetheless, O'Donnell, due to his inability to overcome his own predilection for night, radar bombing, was a significant factor in Hansell's failure to produce and Arnold's decision to act.

Arnold bears his own share of blame as well. By early 1945, Arnold became obsessed with getting results from the B-29. Understandably, he was under great pressure. First, the risk taken to purchase the aircraft from blueprints alone meant the project was a three-billion-dollar gamble. Next, he successfully wrestled operational control from MacArthur with the promise of conducting operations in 1944. The promised date of November 1944 followed nearly a year of anticipation from the Joint Chiefs. Finally, Arnold held a unique relationship with Roosevelt and understood the importance of not only supporting China, but also ending the war quickly. The B-29 was the tool to answer both challenges, but production delays and operational challenges from the Marianas placed even more pressure on Arnold to realize results. By the time of Hansell's removal, the expectation for results were so high that virtually no amount of information he received from the staff could satiate Arnold. The results were never enough; Arnold's mantra was to get more aircraft over the target. One wing of B-29s may never have been able to provide Arnold the results he wanted, especially one that started operations seven months after the President's desired strike date.

Finally, there is the probability Arnold doubted Hansell's ability to lead the XXIst before operations matured. Hansell was probably Arnold's third choice to command the B-29s. After viewing LeMay's successful replacement of Wolfe, Arnold noted to Spaatz the imperative to have combat experience in order to be a successful bomber commander and worried that such experience could be in short supply in his bomber commanders. Although Arnold may have had reservations on Hansell before the first mission to Tokyo, those reservations became insurmountable as LeMay delivered results with the XXth. The language of the letters between Arnold and LeMay during the time that Hansell was struggling with the XXIst's growing pains depicted a sharp preference for one commander over the other. By mid-December 1944, Arnold knew LeMay was going to

be the one to realize the true potential of the B-29, he just had to wait long enough to make the change--seven missions were enough.

None of this means Hansell's removal was unjust. It was probably the necessary action based on the circumstances. The B-29 crews were losing faith in their planes and their tactics. The animosity between Hansell and O'Donnell alone warranted a change of leadership – though this would usually have sent O'Donnell as the subordinate packing. Failing to meet Arnold's expectations, regardless of how unrealistic, also warranted a change. But these instances should not be grounds for labeling someone a failure. The toxic environment existing on Saipan was not Hansell's fault alone. Instead, it was also the result of a subordinate who could not accept the orders of his superiors, one B-29 wing that could never meet the unrealistic expectations of an obsessed leader with suspect confidence and national leadership that was justly demanding success from a program that cost more than the Manhattan Project.

History should recognize the contextual elements surrounding Hansell's removal from the XXIst, and acknowledge he was a victim of circumstances and not an abject failure. This idea offers the potential for analysis of other instances in which Air Force leaders were fired commanders for perceived failure. In 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates fired the Air Force Secretary and Chief of Staff after an inquiry into the mishandling of nuclear weapons and components found systemic problems in the Air Force.² The 2014 cheating scandal at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana led to the removal of ten commanders.³ It would be naïve to expect an objective assessment of these two instances given their relatively recent nature. Decades from now, when subjectivity can occur without the fear of repercussion, perhaps historians will view the culpability of those fired leaders in a different light.

Most Airmen have forgotten Hansell's accomplishments in establishing the backbone of American strategic airpower before and during World War II. They now remember him, if at all, for his failure at the helm of the XXIst in the Marianas. Perhaps the story of how a once prominent officer found himself thrust into an incredibly difficult position may assist our leaders in defining what constitutes success or failure. In the end,

² Tom Shanker, "2 Leaders Ousted from Air Force in Atomic Errors," *The New York Times*, 6 June 2008.

³ Helene Cooper, "Air Force Fires 9 Officers in Scandal Over Cheating on Proficiency Tests," *The New York Times*, 27 March 2014.

Hansell's removal underlines the idea commanders often get more credit and blame than they deserve, a reality that, when remembered and appreciated, leads to effective and enlightened leadership.⁴ Hansell bore the brunt of blame for the early operation of the XXI Bomber Command, but he was not alone in culpability.



⁴ Dr Thomas Hughes, the author's advisor, offered this idea during the drafting of this thesis.

Bibliography

BOOKS

- Arnold, Gen H. H. *Global Mission*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951.
- Biddle, Tami Davis. *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914 – 1945*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Byrd, Martha. *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1987.
- Copp, DeWitt S. *Forged in Fire: Strategy and Decisions in the Air War over Europe, 1940-45*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1982.
- Crane, Conrad C. *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993.
- Craven, Wesley Frank., and James Lea Cate, eds. *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. Vol. 1, *Plans & Early Operations, January 1939 to August 1942*. 1948. New imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983.
- Craven, Wesley Frank., and James Lea Cate, eds. *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. Vol. 2, *Europe: Torch to Pointblank, August 1942 to December 1943*. 1949. New imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983.
- Craven, Wesley Frank., and James Lea Cate, eds. *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. Vol. 5, *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945*. 1953. New imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983.
- Craven, Wesley Frank., and James Lea Cate, eds. *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. Vol. 6, *Men and Planes*. 1953. New imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983.
- Daso, Dik Alan. *Hap Arnold and the Evolution of American Airpower*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.
- Douhet, Giulio. *The Command of the Air*. 1921. Reprint, Tuscaloosa, AL.: University of Alabama Press, 2009.
- Finney, Robert T. *History of the Air Corps Tactical School, 1920 – 1940*. 1955. Reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1992.
- Frank, Richard B. *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*. New York: Random House, 1999.

- Futrell, Robert Frank. *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: A History of Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1907 – 1964*. 1971. Reprint, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1989.
- Gaston, James C. *Planning the American Air War: Four Men and Nine Days in 1941*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1982.
- Griffith, Charles. *The Quest: Haywood Hansell and American Strategic Bombing in World War II*. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1999.
- Hall, R. Cargill. *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment*. Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998.
- Hansell, Maj Gen Haywood S., Jr. *Strategic Air War against Japan*. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, Airpower Research Institute, 1980.
- Hansell, Maj Gen Haywood S., Jr. *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler*. Atlanta, GA: Higgins-McArthur/Longino & Porter, 1972.
- Hansell, Maj Gen Haywood S., Jr. *The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan: A Memoir*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986.
- Harris, Samuel Russ, Jr. *B-29s Over Japan, 1944-1945: A Group Commander's Diary*. Edited by Robert A. Mann. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011.
- Hastings, Max. *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45*. New York: Random House, 2007.
- Huston, Maj Gen John W., ed. *American Airpower Comes of Age: General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold's World War II Diaries*. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2002.
- LeMay, Gen Curtis E., and Bill Yenne. *Superfortress: The Story of the B-29 and American Air Power*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988.
- McFarland, Stephen L. and Wesley P. Newton. *To Command the Sky: The Battle for Air Superiority over Germany, 1942 – 1944*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
- Meilinger, Phillip S. *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources*. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2001.
- Meilinger, Phillip S. *Bomber: The Formation and Early Years of Strategic Air Command*. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2012.

Nutter, Ralph H. *With the Possum and the Eagle: The Memoir of a Navigator's War over Germany and Japan*. Novata, CA: Presidio Press, 2002.

Overy, Richard J. *The Air War 1939 – 1945*. 1980. Reprint, Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005.

Schaffer, Ronald. *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Sunderman, Maj James F., ed. *World War II in the Air: The Pacific*. New York, Franklin Watts, 1962.

US Government. *The United States Strategic Bombing Surveys: European and Pacific War Summary Reports*. 1945 and 1946. Reprint, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1987.

Werrell, Kenneth P. *Blankets of Fire: U.S. Bombers over Japan during World War II*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.

JOURNAL

Frisbee, John L. "The Loneliness of Command." *Air Force Magazine*, July 1983, 77.

PAPERS/COLLECTIONS

Haywood Hansell Papers. Air Force Historical Research Agency. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

Papers of Charles Griffith.

Haywood Hansell, Murray Green, and Emmett O'Donnell Collections. US Air Force Academy Library, Special Collections, Colorado Springs, CO.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Cooper, Helene. "Air Force Fires 9 Officers in Scandal Over Cheating on Proficiency Tests." *New York Times*, 27 March 2014.

The New York Times, 25 November 1944.

Shalett, Sidney. "This Possum is Jap Poison." *Saturday Evening Post*, 25 November 1944.

Shanker, Tom. "2 Leaders Ousted from Air Force in Atomic Errors." *The New York Times*, 6 June 2008.

Strebig, James J. "Superfortress Chief, Hansell, Had Swift Rise." *The Atlanta Constitution*, 2 July 1944.

UNIT HISTORIES

History. *Superfort Saga*. 873rd Squadron Historical Association, 1946.

History. *The 20th Over Japan*. Army Air Force Publication Company, 1947.

MAPS

University of Alabama. *Maxwell Air Force Base 1937*.

http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/aerials/Counties/Montgomery/Montgomery_Maxwell_Air_Force_Base_1937.html

Google Maps.

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Maxwell+AFB,+Montgomery,+AL+36112/@32.380447,-86.3472873,2432m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!3m1!1s0x888e8696c9209285:0x63fccd98f97d4075>

OTHER SOURCES

Fabyanic, Thomas A. "A Critique of United States Air War Planning, 1941 – 1945." PhD diss., Saint Louis University, 1973.